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COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. CCCXXII.

HEARTSEASE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

M. A. Marsh.
Miss Caroline Mary Yonge
Yonge
JW 11.10.93
C

HEARTSEASE

OR

THE BROTHER'S WIFE

Yonge

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE."

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1855.

Dear is the morning gale of spring,
And dear the autumnal eve;
But few delights can summer bring
The Poet's crown to weave.

CHRISTIAN YEAR.

HEARTSEASE;

OR,

THE BROTHER'S WIFE.

VOL. I.

PART I.

And Maidens call them Love in Idleness.
Midsummer Night's Dream.

CHAPTER I.

There are none of England's daughters that bear a prouder presence.
* * * * * * *
And a kingly blood sends glances up, her princely eye to trouble,
And the shadow of a monarch's crown is softened in her hair.
ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

THE sun shone slanting over a spacious park, the undulating ground here turning a broad lawn towards the beams that silvered every blade of grass; there, curving away in banks of velvet green, shadowed by the trees; gnarled old thorns in the holiday suit whence they take their name, giant's nosegays of horse chestnuts, mighty elms and stalwart oaks, singly or in groups, the aristocracy of the place; while in the background rose wooded coverts, where every tint of early green blended in rich masses of varied foliage.

An avenue, nearly half a mile in length, consisted of a quadruple range of splendid lime trees of uniform growth, the side arcades vaulted over by the meeting branches, and the central road, where the same lights and shadows were

again and again repeated, conducting the eye in diminishing perspective to a mansion on a broad base of stone steps. Herds of cattle, horses, and deer, gave animation to the scene, and near the avenue were a party of village children running about gathering cowslips, or seated on the grass, devouring substantial plum buns.

Under a lordly elm sat a maiden of about nineteen years; at her feet a Skye terrier, like a walking door-mat, with a fierce and droll countenance, and by her side a girl and boy, the one sickly and poorly clad, the other with bright inquiring eyes, striving to compensate for the want of other faculties. She was teaching them to form that delight of childhood, a cowslip ball, the other children supplying her with handfuls of the gold-coated flowers, and returning a pull of the forelock or a bobbed curtsey to her smiling thanks.

Her dress was of a plain brown-holland looking material, the bonnet she had thrown off was of the coarsest straw, but her whole air declared her the daughter of that lordly house; and had gold and rubies been laid before her instead of cowslips with fairy favours, they would well have become her princely port, long neck, and stately head, crowned with a braid of her profuse black hair. That regal look was more remarkable in her than beauty; her brow was too high, her features not quite regular, her complexion of gypsy darkness, but with a glow of colour, and her eyes very large, black, and deeply set, naturally grave in expression, but just now beaming and dancing in accordance with the encouraging smiles on her fresh healthy red lips, as her hands, very soft and delicate, though of large and strong make, completed the ball, threw it in the little boy's face, and laughed to see his ecstasy over the delicious prize; teaching him to play with it, tossing it backwards and forwards, shaking him into animation, and ever and anon chasing her little dog to extract it from between his teeth.

Suddenly she became aware of the presence of a spectator, and instantly assuming her bonnet, and drawing up her tall figure, she exclaimed, in a tone of welcome:

"Oh, Mr. Wingfield, you are come to see our cowslip feast."

"There seems to be great enjoyment," replied the young curate, looking, however, somewhat pre-occupied.

"Look at Charlie Layton," said she, pointing to the dumb boy. "That ball is perfect felicity, he had rather not play with it, the delight is mere possession." She was turning to the boy again, when Mr. Wingfield said, not without hesitation — "You have not heard when to expect your party from Madeira?"

"You know we cannot hear again. They were to sail by the next packet, and it is uncertain how soon they may arrive."

"And — and — your brother Arthur. Do you know when he comes home?"

"He promised to come this spring, but I fancy Captain Fitzhugh has inveigled him somewhere to fish. He never writes, so he may come any day. But what — is anything the matter?"

"I have a letter here that — which — in Lord Martindale's absence, I thought it might be better — you might prefer my coming direct to you. I cannot but think you should be aware" — stammered Mr. Wingfield.

"Well," — she said, haughtily.

"Here is a letter from my cousin, who has a curacy in the Lake country. Your brother is at Wrangerton, the next town."

"Arthur is well?" cried she, starting.

"Yes, yes, you need not be alarmed, but I am afraid there is some entanglement. There are some Miss Mosses—."

"Oh, it is that kind of thing!" said she, in an altered tone, her cheeks glowing; "it is very silly of him to get himself talked about; but of course it is all nothing."

"I wish I could think so," said Mr. Wingfield; "but indeed, Miss Martindale," for she was returning to the children, "I am afraid it is a serious matter. The father is a designing person."

"Arthur will not be taken in," was her first calm answer; but perceiving the curate unconvinced, though unwilling to contradict, she added, "But what is the story?"

Mr. Wingfield produced the letter, and read; "Fanshawe, the curate of Wrangerton, has just been with me, telling me his rector is in much difficulty and perplexity about a son of your parishioner, Lord Martindale. He came to Wrangerton with another guardsman for the sake of the fishing, and has been drawn into an engagement with one of the daughters of old Moss, who manages the St. Erme property. I know nothing against the young ladies, indeed Fanshawe speaks highly of them; but the father is a disreputable sort of attorney, who has taken advantage of Lord St. Erme's absence and neglect to make a prey of the estate. The marriage is to take place immediately, and poor Mr. Jones is in much distress at the dread of being asked to perform the ceremony, without the consent of the young man's family."

"He cannot do it," exclaimed the young lady; "you had better write and tell him so."

"I am afraid," said Mr. Wingfield, diffidently, "I am afraid he has no power to refuse."

"Not in such a case as this? It is his duty to put a stop to it."

"All that is in his power he will do, no doubt, by reasoning and remonstrance; but you must remember that your brother is of age, and if the young lady's parents consent, Mr. Jones has no choice."

"I could not have believed it! However, it will not come to that: it is only the old rector's fancy. To make everything secure I will write to my brother, and we shall soon see him here."

"There is still an hour before post-time," said Mr. Wingfield; "shall I send the children home?"

"No, poor little things, let them finish their game. Thank you for coming to me. My aunt will, I hope, hear nothing of it. Good evening."

Calling an elder girl, she gave some directions; and Mr. Wingfield watched her walking down the avenue with a light-footed but decided and characteristic tread, expressing in every step, "Where I am going, there I will go, and nothing shall stop me."

"Nonsense!" she said to herself; "Arthur cannot be so lost to the sense of everything becoming. Such pain cannot be in store for me! Anything else I could bear; but this must not, cannot, shall not be. Arthur is all I have; I cannot spare him; and to see him shipwrecked on a low-bred designing creature would be too much misery. Impossible — so clear-headed as he is, so fastidious about women! And yet this letter spoke decidedly. People talk of love! and Arthur is so easy, he would let himself be drawn on rather than make a disturbance. He might be ensnared with his eyes open, because he disliked the trouble of breaking loose, and so would not think of the consequence. Nothing could save him so well as sóme one going to him. He can read a letter or not as he chooses. Oh, if papa were at home — oh, if Mr. Wingfield were but Percy Fotheringham — he who fears no man, and can manage any one! Oh! if I could go myself; he heeds me when he heeds no one else. Shall I go? Why not? It would save him; it would be the only effectual way. Let me see. I would take Simmonds and Pauline. But then, I must explain to my aunt. Stuff! there are real interests at stake! Suppose this is exaggeration — why, then, I should be ridiculous, and Arthur would never forget it. Besides, I believe I cannot get there in one day — certainly not return the same. I must give way to conventionalities, and be a helpless young lady."

She reached the house, and quickly dashed off her letter: —

"My dear Arthur, — I hope and trust this letter may be quite uncalled for, though I feel it my duty to write it. I used to have some influence with you, and I should think that anything that reminded you of home would make you pause.

"Report has of course outrun the truth. It is impossible you should be on the brink of marriage without letting us know — as much so, I should trust, as your seriously contemplating an engagement with one beneath your notice. I dare say you find it very pleasant to amuse yourself; but consider, before you allow yourself to form an attachment — I will not say before becoming a victim to sordid speculation. You know what poor John has gone through, though there was no inferiority there. Think what you would have to bear for the sake, perhaps, of a pretty face, but of a person incapable of being a companion or comfort, and whom you would be ashamed to see beside your own family. Or, supposing your own affections untouched, what right have you to trifle with the feelings of a poor girl, and raise expectations you cannot and ought not to fulfil? You are too kind, when once you reflect, to inflict such pain, you, who cannot help being loved. Come away while it is time; come home, and have the merit of self-sacrifice. If your fancy is smitten, it will recover in its proper sphere. If it costs you pain, you know to whom you have always hitherto turned in your vexations. Dear Arthur, do not ruin yourself; only come back to me. Write at once; I cannot bear the suspense.

"Your most affectionate sister,
"Theodora A. Martindale."

She made two copies of this letter; one she directed to "The Hon. Arthur Martindale, Grenadier Guards, Winchester;" the other, "Post-office, Wrangerton." In rather more than a week she was answered: —

"My dear Theodora, — You judged rightly that I am no man to trifle, or to raise expectations which I did not mean to fulfil. My wife and I are at Matlock for a few days before joining at Winchester.

"Your affectionate brother,
"Arthur N. Martindale."

CHAPTER II.

She's less of a bride than a bairn,
She's ta'en like a colt from the heather,
With sense and discretion to learn.

A chiel maun be patient and steady
That yokes with a mate in her teens.
Woo'd and Married and A'.
JOANNA BAILLIE.

A GENTLEMAN stood waiting at the door of a house not far from the Winchester barracks.

"Is my brother at home, James?" as the servant gave a start of surprise and recognition.

"No, Sir; he is not in the house, but Mrs. —; will you walk in? I hope I see you better, Sir."

"Much better, thank you. Did you say Mrs. Martindale was at home?

"Yes, Sir, Mr. Arthur will soon be here. Won't you walk in?"

"Is she in the drawing-room?"

"No, I do not think so, Sir. She went upstairs when she came in."

"Very well. I 'll send up my card," said he, entering, and the man as he took it, said, with emphasis, and a pleading look, "She is a very nice young lady, Sir," then opened a room door.

He suddenly announced, "Mr. Martindale," and that gentleman unexpectedly found himself in the presence of a young girl, who rose in such confusion that he could not look at her as he shook her by the hand, saying, "Is Arthur near home?"

"Yes -- no — yes; at least, he 'll come soon," was the reply, as if she hardly knew what her words were.

"Were you going out?" he asked, seeing a bonnet on the sofa.

"No, thank you; — at least I mean, I 'm just come in. He went to speak to some one, and I came to finish my letter. He 'll soon come," said she, with the rapid ill-

assured manner of a school-girl receiving her mamma's visitors.

"Don't let me interrupt you," said he, taking up a book.

"O no, no, thank you," cried she, in a tremor lest she should have been uncivil. "I didn't mean — I 've plenty of time. 'T is only to my home, and they have had one by the early post."

He smiled, saying, "You are a good correspondent."

"Oh! I must write. Annette and I were never apart before."

"Your sister?"

"Yes, only a year older. We always did everything together."

He ventured to look up, and saw a bright dew on a soft, shady pair of dark eyes, a sweet quivering smile on a very pretty mouth, and a glow of pure bright deep pink on a most delicately fair skin, contrasted with braids of dark brown hair. She was rather above the ordinary height, slender, and graceful, and the childish beauty of the form of face and features, surprised him; but to his mind the chief grace was the shy, sweet tenderness, happy and bright, but tremulous with the recent pain of the parting from home. With a kindly impulse, he said, "You must tell me your name, Arthur has not mentioned it."

"Violet;" and as he did not appear at once to catch its unusual sound, she repeated, "Violet Helen; we most of us have strange names."

"Violet Helen," he repeated, with an intonation as if struck, not unpleasingly, by the second name. "Well, that is the case in our family. My sister has an uncommon name."

"Theodora," said Violet, pausing, as if too timid to inquire further.

"Have you only this one sister?" he said.

"Six, and one brother," said she, in a tone of exulting fondness.

A short silence, and then the joyful exclamation, "There

he is!" and she sprang to the door, leaving it open, as her fresh young voice announced, full of gratulation, "Here's your brother."

Guileless and unconscious of evil, poor child! thought the brother; but I wonder how Arthur likes the news.

Arthur entered, a fine-looking young man, of three-and-twenty, dark, bright complexioned, tall, and robust. He showed not the least consciousness of having offended, and his bride smiled freely as if at rest from all embarrassment now that she had her protector.

"Well, John," was his greeting, warmly spoken, "You here? You look better. How is the cough?"

"Better, thank you."

"I see I need not introduce you," said Arthur, laying his hand on the arm of his blushing Violet, who shrank up to him as he gave a short laugh; "Have you been here long?"

"Only about five minutes."

"And you are come to stay?"

"Thank you, if you can take me in for a day or two."

"That we can. There is a tolerable spare room, and James will find a place for Brown. I am glad to see you looking so much better. Have you got rid of the pain in your side?"

"Entirely, thank you, for the last few weeks."

"How is my mother?"

"Very well. She enjoyed the voyage extremely."

"She won't concoct another Tour?"

"I don't think so," said John, gravely.

"There has *she*," indicating his wife, "been thinking it her duty to read the old Italian one, which I never opened in my life. I declare it would take a dictionary to understand a page. She is scared at the variety of tongues, and feels as if she was in Babel."

John was thinking that if he did not know this rattling talk to be a form of embarrassment, he should take it for effrontery.

"Shall I go and see about the room?" half-whispered Violet.

"Yes, do;" and he opened the door for her, exclaiming, almost before she was fairly gone, "There! you want no more explanation."

"She is very lovely!" said John, in a tone full of cordial admiration.

"Isn't she?" continued Arthur, triumphantly. "Such an out of the way style; — the dark eyes and hair, with that exquisite complexion, ivory fairness, — the form of her face the perfect oval! — what you so seldom see — and her figure, just the right height, tall and taper! I don't believe she could be awkward if she was to try. She'll beat every creature hollow, especially in a few years' time when she's a little more formed."

"She is very young?"

"Sixteen on our wedding-day. That's the beauty of it. If she had been a day older it would have been a different thing. Not that they could have spoilt her, — she is a thoroughbred by nature, and no mistake."

"How did your acquaintance begin?"

"This way," said Arthur, leaning back, and twirling a chair on one of its legs for a pivot. "Fitzhugh would have me come down for a fortnight's fishing to Wrangerton. There's but one inn there fit to put a dog to sleep in, and when we got there we found the house turned out of window for a ball, all the partitions down on the first floor, and we driven into holes to be regaled with distant fiddle-squeak. So Fitzhugh's Irish blood was up for a dance, and I thought I might as well give in to it, for the floor shook so that there was no taking a cigar in peace. So you see the stars ordained it, and it is of no use making a row about one's destiny," concluded Arthur, in a sleepy voice, ceasing to spin the chair.

"That was your first introduction?"

"Ay. After that, one was meeting the Mosses for ever; indeed, we had to call on the old fellow to get leave for fish-

ing in that water of Lord St. Erme's. He has a very pretty sort of little place out of the town close to the park, and — and somehow the weather was too bright for any sport, and the stream led by their garden."

"I perceive," said John.

"Well, I saw I was in for it, and had nothing for it but to go through with it. Anything for a quiet life."

"A new mode of securing it," said John, indignant at his nonchalance.

"There you don't display your wonted sagacity," returned Arthur coolly. "You little know what I have gone through on your account. If you had been sound-winded, you would have saved me no end of persecution."

"You have not avoided speculation as it is," John could not help saying.

"I beg to observe that you are mistaken. Old Moss is as cunning a fox as ever lived; but I saw his game, and without my own good-will he might have whistled for me. I saw what he was up to, and let him know it, but as I was always determined that when I married it should be to please myself, not my aunt, I let things take their course and saved the row at home."

"I am sure she knew nothing of this."

"She? Bless you, poor child. She is as innocent as a lamb, and only thinks me all the heroes in the world."

"She did not know my father was ignorant of it?"

"Not she. She does not know it to this day." John sat thinking; Arthur twirled the chair, then said, "That is the fact. I suppose my aunt had a nice story for you."

"It agreed in the main with yours."

"I was unlucky," said Arthur, "I meant to have brought her home before my aunt and Theodora had any news of it. I could have got round them that way, but somehow Theodora got scent of it, and wrote me a furious letter, full of denunciation — two of them — they hunted me everywhere, so I saw it was no use going there."

"She is much hurt at your letter. I can see that she is, though she tries to hide her feelings. She was looking quite pale when we came home, and I can hardly bear to see the struggle to look composed when you are mentioned."

This evidently produced some compunction, but Arthur tried to get rid of it. "I am sure there was nothing to take to heart in it — was there, John?"

"I don't know. She had burnt it without letting any one see it; and it was only through my aunt that we learnt that she had received it."

"Well! her temper is up, and I am sorry for it," said Arthur. "I forget what I said. I dare say it was no more than she deserved. I got one of these remonstrances of hers at Wrangerton, on the day before, and another followed me a couple of days after to Matlock, so I could not have that going on for ever, and wrote off to put a stop to it. But what does his lordship say?"

"Do you wish him to forgive or not?" said his brother, nearly out of patience.

"Of course — I knew he would; he can't leave us with nothing to live on. There's nothing to be done but to go through the forms, and I am quite ready. Come, what's the use of looking intensely disgusted? Now you have seen her, you don't expect me to profess that I am very sorry, and 'will never do so no more.'"

"I say nothing against her, but the way of doing it."

"So much trouble saved. Besides, I tell you I am ready to make whatever apology my father likes for a preliminary."

His brother looked vexed, and dropped the conversation, waiting to see more of the bride before he should form an opinion.

It was seeing rather than hearing, for she was in much awe of him, blushed more than she spoke, and seemed taken up by the fear of doing something inappropriate, constantly turning wistful, inquiring looks towards her husband, to seek encouragement or direction, but it was a be-

coming confusion, and by no means lessened the favourable impression.

The next morning Arthur was engaged, and left her to be the guide to the cathedral, whereat she looked shy and frightened, but Mr. Martindale set himself to re-assure her, and the polished gentleness of his manner soon succeeded.

They stood on the hill, overlooking the town and the vale of Itchen, winding away till lost between the green downs that arose behind their crested neighbour, St. Catherine's Hill, and in the valley beneath reposed the gray Cathedral's lengthened nave and square tower, its lesser likeness, St. Cross, and the pinnacles of the College tower.

"A very pretty view," said Mr. Martindale.

"The old buildings are very fine, but it is not like our own hills."

"No, it is hard on Hampshire downs to compare them to Cumberland mountains."

"But it is so sunny and beautiful," said the bright young bride. "See the sunshine on the green meadows, and the hay-making. Oh! I shall always love it." John heard a great deal of happiness in those words. "I never saw a cathedral before," she added.

"Have you been over this one?"

"Yes, but it will be such a treat to go again. One can't take a quarter of it in at once."

"No, it takes half a lifetime to learn a cathedral properly."

"It is a wonderful thing," she said, with the same serious face; then changing her tone to one of eagerness, "I want to find Bishop Fox's tomb, for he was a north-country bishop."

John smiled. "You are perfect in the cathedral history."

"I bought a little book about it."

Her knowledge was, he found, in a girlish state of keen interest, and not deficient, but what pleased him best was that as they entered and stood at the west door, looking down the whole magnificent length of nave, choir, and chapel, the

embowered roof high above, sustained on massive pillars, she uttered a low murmur of "beautiful!" and there was a heartfelt expression of awe and reverence on her face, a look as of rapt thought, chased away in a moment by his eye, and giving place to quiet pensiveness. After the service, they went over the building, but though eager for information, the gravity did not leave her, nor did she speak at once when they emerged into the Close.

"It is very impressive," said John.

"I suppose you have seen a great many cathedrals?"

"Yes, many foreign ones, and a few English."

"I wonder whether seeing many makes one feel the same as seeing one."

"How do you mean?"

"I do not think I could ever care for another like this one."

"As your first?"

"Yes. It has made me understand better what books say about churches, and their being like —"

"Like?"

She changed her sentence. "It makes one think, and want to be good."

"It is what all truly beautiful things should do," said John.

"Oh! I am glad you say so," exclaimed Violet. "It is like what Annette and I have wondered about — I mean why fine statues or pictures, or anything of that kind, should make one feel half sad and half thoughtful when one looks at them long."

"Perhaps because it is a straining after the only true beauty."

"I must tell Annette that. It was she that said it was so," said Violet; "and we wondered Greek statues gave one that feel, but I see it must be the reason."

"What statues have you seen?"

"Those at Wrangerton House. Lord St. Erme is always sending cases home, and it is such a festival day to go up

and see them unpacked, and Caroline and Annette go and take drawings, and I like to wander about the rooms, and look at everything," said Violet, growing talkative on the theme of home. "There is one picture I like above all, but that is a sacred subject, so no wonder it should have that feeling in it."

"What is it?"

"It is a Madonna," she said, lowering her voice. "A stiff old-fashioned one, in beautiful bright clear colouring. The Child is reaching out to embrace a little cross, and his Mother holds him towards it with such a sad but such a holy face, as if she foreboded all, and was ready to bear it."

"Ah! that Ghirlandajo?"

"That is the name!" cried Violet, enchanted. "Have you seen it?"

"I saw Lord St. Erme buy it."

"Do you know Lord St. Erme?" said Violet, rather awe-struck.

"I used to meet him in Italy."

"We wish so much that he would come home. We do so want to see a poet."

John smiled. "Is he never at home?"

"O, no; he has never been at Wrangerton since his father died, twelve years ago. He does not like the place, so he only comes to London when he is in England, and papa goes up to meet him on business; but he is too poetical to attend to it."

"I should guess that."

"I have done wrong," said Violet, checking herself, "I should not have said that. Mamma told us we ought never to chatter about his concerns. Will you, please, not remember that I said it?"

"As far as the outer world is concerned, I certainly will not," said John, kindly. "You cannot too early learn discretion. So that picture is at Wrangerton?"

"I am so glad you liked it."

"I liked it well enough to wish for a few spare hundreds,

but it seems to have afforded no more pleasure to him than it has given to me. I am glad it is gone where there is some one who can appreciate it."

"Oh," said Violet, "Matilda knows all about the best pictures. We don't appreciate, you know, we only like."

"And your chief liking is for that one?"

"It is more than liking," said Violet; "I could call it loving. It is almost the same to me as Helvellyn. Annette and I went to the house for one more look, my last evening at home. I must tell her that you have seen it!" and the springing steps grew so rapid, that her companion had to say, "Don't let me detain you, I am obliged to go gently up hill." She checked her steps, abashed, and presently, with a shy but very pretty action, held out her arm, saying timidly, "Would it help you to lean on me? I ought not to have brought you this steep way. Matilda says I skurry like a school-girl."

He saw it would console her to let her think herself of service, and accepted the slender prop for the few steps that remained. He then went upstairs to write letters, but finding no ink, came to the drawing-room to ask her for some. She had only her own ink-stand, which was supplying her letter to Annette, and he sat down at the opposite side of the table to share it. Her pen went much faster than his. "Clifton Terrace, Winchester," and "My dear father — I came here yesterday, and was most agreeably surprised," was all that he had indited, when he paused to weigh what was his real view of the merits of the case, and ponder whether his present feeling was sober judgment, or the novelty of the bewitching prettiness of this innocent and gracious creature. There he rested, musing, while from her pen flowed a description of her walk and of Mr. Martindale's brother. "If they are all like him, I shall be perfectly happy," she wrote. "I never saw any one so kind and considerate, and so gentle; only now and then he frightens me, with his politeness, or perhaps polish is the right word; it makes me feel myself rude and uncourteous and awkward. You said nothing gave you

so much the notion of high-breeding as Mr. Martindale's ease, especially when he pretended to be rough and talk slang, it was like playing at it. Now, his brother has the same, without the funny roughness, but the greatest gentleness, and a good deal of quiet sadness. I suppose it is from his health, though he is much better now; he still coughs, and he moves slowly and leans languidly, as if he was not strong. He is not so tall as his brother, and much slighter in make, and fairer complexioned, with gray eyes and brown hair, and he looks sallow and worn and thin, with such white long hands."

Here raising her eyes to verify her description, she encountered those of its subject, evidently taking a survey of her for the same purpose. He smiled, and she was thereby encouraged to break into a laugh, so girlish and light-hearted, so unconscious how much depended on his report, that he could not but feel compassionate.

Alarmed at the graver look, she crimsoned, exclaiming, "Oh! I beg your pardon! It was very rude."

"No, no," said John; "it was absurd!" and vexed at having checked her gladsomeness, he added, "It is I rather who should ask your pardon, for looks that will not make a cheerful figure in your description."

"Oh, no," cried Violet; "mamma told me never to say anything against any of Mr. Martindale's relations. What have I said?"—as he could not help laughing—"Something I could not have meant."

"Don't distress yourself, pray," said John, not at all in a bantering tone. "I know what you meant; and it was very wise advice, such as you will be very glad to have followed."

With a renewed blush, an ingenuous look, and a hesitating effort, she said, "*Indeed*, I have been telling them how very kind you are. Mamma will be so pleased to hear it."

"She must have been very sorry to part with you," said he, looking at the fair girl sent so early into the world.

"Oh, yes!" and the tears started to the black eyelashes,

though a smile came at the same time; "she said I should be such a giddy young housekeeper, and she would have liked a little more notice."

"It was not very long?" said John, anxious to lead her to give him information; and she was too young and happy not to be confidential, though she looked down and glowed as she answered, "Six weeks."

"And you met at the ball?"

"Yes, it was very curious;" and with deepening blushes she went on, the smile of happiness on her lips, and her eyes cast down. "Annette was to go for the first time, and she would not go without me. Mamma did not like it, for I was not sixteen then; but uncle Christopher came, and said I should, because I was his pet. But I can never think it was such a short time; it seems a whole age ago."

"It must," said John, with a look of interest that made her continue.

"It was very odd how it all happened. Annette and I had no one to dance with, and were wondering who those two gentlemen were. Captain Fitzhugh was dancing with Miss Evelyn, and he — Mr. Martindale — was leaning against the wall, looking on."

"I know exactly — with his arms crossed so —"

"Yes, just so," said Violet, smiling; "and presently Grace Bennet came and told Matilda who they were; and while I was listening, oh, I was so surprised, for there was Albert, my brother, making me look round. Mr. Martindale had asked to be introduced to us, and he asked me to dance. I don't believe I answered right, for I thought he meant Matilda. But," said she, breaking off, "how I am chattering and hindering you!" and she coloured and looked down.

"Not at all," said John; "there is nothing I wish more to hear, or that concerns me more nearly. Anything you like to tell."

"I am afraid it is silly," half-whispered Violet to herself; but the recollection was too pleasant not to be easily drawn

out; and at her age the transition is short from shyness to confidence.

"Not at all silly," said John. "You know I must wish to hear how I gained a sister." Then, as the strangeness of imagining that this grave, high-bred, more than thirty-years-old gentleman, could possibly call her by such a name, set her smiling and blushing in confusion, he wiled on her communications by saying, "Well, that evening you danced with Arthur."

"Three times. It was a wonderful evening. Annette and I said, when we went to bed, we had seen enough to think of for weeks. We did not know how much more was going to happen."

"No, I suppose not."

"I thought much of it when he bowed to me. I little fancied — but there was another odd coincidence — wasn't it? In general I never go into the drawing-room to company, because there are three older; but the day they came to speak to papa about the fishing, mamma and all the elder ones were out of the way, except Matilda. I was doing my Roman history with her, when papa came in and said, we must both come into the drawing-room."

"You saw more of him from that time?"

"O yes; he dined with us. It was the first time I ever dined with a party, and he talked so much to me, that Albert began to laugh at me; but Albert always laughs. I did not care till — till — that day when he walked with us in the park, coming home from fishing."

Her voice died away, and her face burnt as she looked down; but a few words of interest led her on.

"When I told mamma, she said most likely he thought me a little girl who didn't signify; but I did not think he could, for I am the tallest of them all, and every one says I look as if I was seventeen, at least. And then she told me grand gentlemen and officers didn't care what nonsense they talked. You know she didn't know him so well then," said Violet, looking up pleadingly.

"She was very prudent."

"She could not know he did not deserve it," said the young bride, ready to resent it for her husband, since his brother did not, then again excusing her mother. "It was all her care for me, dear mamma! She told me not to think about it; but I could not help it! Indeed I could not!"

"No, indeed," and painful recollections of his own pressed on him, but he could not help being glad this tender young heart was not left to pine under disappointment. "How long ago was this?"

"That was six weeks ago — a month before our wedding-day," said she, blushingly. "I did wish it could have been longer. I wanted to learn how to keep house, and I never could, for he was always coming to take me to walk in the park. And it all happened so fast, I had no time to understand it, nor to talk to mamma and Matilda. And then mamma cried so much! I don't feel to understand it now; but soon perhaps I shall have more quiet time. I should like to have waited till Lord Martindale came home, but they said that could not be, because his leave of absence would be over. I did wish very much though that Miss Martindale could have left her aunt to come to our wedding."

John found reply so difficult, that he was glad to be interrupted by Arthur's return. He soon after set out to call upon Captain Fitzhugh, who had been at Wrangerton with Arthur.

From him more of the circumstances were gathered. Mr. Moss was the person universally given up to reprobation. "A thorough schemer," said the Irish captain. As to the Miss Mosses, they were lady-like girls, most of them pretty, and everywhere well spoken of. In fact, John suspected he had had a little flirtation on his own account with some of them, though he took credit to himself for having warned his friend to be careful. He ended with a warm-hearted speech, by no means displeasing to John, hoping he would make the best of it with Lord Martindale, for after all, she was as pretty a creature as could be seen, one that any man might be proud

of for a daughter-in-law; and to his mind it was better than leaving the poor girl to break her heart after him when it had gone so far.

Arthur himself was in a more rational mood that evening. He had at first tried to hide his embarrassment by bravado; but he now changed his tone, and as soon as Violet had left the dining-room, began by an abrupt inquiry, "What would you have me do?"

"Why don't you write to my father?"

Arthur writhed. "I suppose it must come to that," he said; "but tell me first the state of things."

"You could not expect that there would not be a good deal of indignation."

"Ay, ay! How did you get the news? Did Theodora tell you?"

"No; there was a letter from Colonel Harrington; and at home they knew the circumstances pretty correctly through a cousin of Wingfield's, who has a curacy in that neighbourhood."

"Oh! that was the way Theodora came by the news. I wish he had let alone telling her, — I could have managed her alone; — but there! it was not in human nature not to tell such a story, and it did not much matter how it was done. Well, and my aunt is furious, I suppose, but I'll take care of her and of my lady. I only want to know how my father takes it."

"He cannot endure the notion of a family feud; but the first step must come from you."

"Very well: — and so you came to set it going. It is very good-natured of you, John. I depended on you or Theodora for helping me through, but I did not think you would have come in this way. I am glad you have, for now you have seen her you can't say a word against it."

"Against *her*, certainly not. I have made acquaintance with her this morning, and — and there is everything to interest one in her:" and then, as Arthur looked delighted, and was ready to break into a rhapsody — "Her simplicity

especially. When you write you had better mention her entire ignorance of the want of sanction. I cannot think how she was kept in such unconsciousness."

"She knows nothing of people's ways," said Arthur. "She knew you were all abroad, and her own family told her it was all right. Her father is a bit of a tyrant, and stopped the mother's mouth, I fancy, if she had any doubts. As to herself, it was much too pretty to see her so happy, to let her set up her little scruples. She did just as she was told, like a good child."

"O Arthur! you have undertaken a great responsibility!" exclaimed John.

But Arthur, without seeming to heed, continued, "So you see she is quite clear; but I'll write, and you shall see if it is not enough to satisfy my father, before he sets us going respectably."

"I can't answer for anything of that sort."

"Something he must do," said Arthur, "for my allowance is not enough to keep a cat; and as to the ninth part of old Moss's pickings and stealings, if I meant to dirt my fingers with it, it won't be to be come by till he is disposed of, and that won't be these thirty years."

"Then, he let you marry without settling anything on her?"

"He was glad to have her off his hands on any terms. Besides, to tell you the truth, John, I am convinced he had no notion you would ever come home again. He knew I saw his game, and dreaded I should be off; so he and I were both of one mind, to have it over as soon as possible."

"I only hope you will make her happy!" said John, earnestly.

"Happy!" exclaimed Arthur, surprised; "small doubt of that! What should prevent me?"

"I think you will find you must make some sacrifices."

"It all depends on my father," said Arthur, a little crossly, and taking his writing case from another table.

He was so well pleased with his performance that, as

soon as he was alone with Violet, he began, "There, I've done it! John said it could not be better, and after the impression you have made, no fear but he will pacify the great folks."

She was perplexed. "Who?" said she; "not Lord and Lady Martindale? Oh! surely I have not done anything to displease them."

"You must have been ingenious if you had."

"Pray, do tell me? Why are they to be pacified? What is the matter? Do they think they shan't like me? Ought I to do anything?"

"My little bird, don't twitter so fast. You have asked a dozen questions in a breath."

"I wish you would tell me what it means," said Violet, imploringly.

"Well, I suppose you must know sooner or later. It only means that they are taken by surprise."

Violet gazed at him in perplexity, then, with a dawning perception, "Oh! surely you don't mean they did not approve of it."

"Nobody asked them," said Arthur, carelessly, then as she turned away, covering her face with her hands, "But it is nothing to take to heart in that way. I am my own master, you know, you silly child, and you had plenty of consent, and all that sort of thing, to satisfy you, so you are quite out of the scrape."

She scarcely seemed to hear.

"Come, come, Violet, this won't do," he continued, putting his arm round her, and turning her towards him, while he pulled down her hands. "This is pretty usage. You can't help it now if you would."

"Oh! Mr. Martindale!"

"Ah! you don't know what I have saved you. I was not going to see all that pink paint worn off those cheeks, nor your life and my own wasted in waiting for them to bring their minds to it. I have seen enough of that. Poor John there—"

"How? — What?" said Violet, with alarmed curiosity.

"She died," said Arthur.

"How long ago? What was her name?"

"Helen Fotheringham. She was our old parson's daughter. They waited eight years, and she died last summer. I see he wears his mourning still."

Violet looked aghast, and spoke low. "How very sad! Helen! That was the reason he looked up when he heard it was my name. Poor Mr. John Martindale! I saw the crape on his hat. Was that what made him so ill?"

"It nearly killed him last year, but he never had lungs good for anything. First, my aunt set my father against it, and when he gave in, she had a crabbed decrepit old grandfather, and between them they were the death of her, and almost of him. I never thought he would rally again."

"Only last year!" exclaimed Violet. "O dear! and there have I been telling him all about — about this spring. I would not have done it, if I had known. I thought he looked melancholy sometimes. Oh! I wish I had not."

"You did, did you?" said Arthur, much amused. "You chatterbox."

"Oh! I am so sorry. I wish —"

"No, no, he only liked you the better for it. I assure you, Violet, he almost said so. Then that was what made him lay such stress on your being an innocent little victim."

"Would you be so kind as to explain it to me?" said Violet, in such serious distress that he answered with less trifling than usual, "There is nothing to tell. I knew how it would be if I asked leave, so I took it. That's all."

"And — and surely they didn't know this at home?"

"The less said about that the better, Violet," said Arthur. "You are all right, you know, and in great favour with John. He can do anything with my father, and I have written. We shall be at home before the end of another month, and set going with a decent income in London. A house — where shall it be? Let me see, he can't give me less than 1000*l.* a-year, perhaps 1500*l.* I vow I don't see why it should not be

2000*l.* John wants no more than he has got, and will never marry now, and there is only Theodora. I was always my aunt's favourite, and if you mind what you are about we shall have our share of the old sugar-planter's hoards, better than the Barbuda property — all niggers and losses. I wash my hands of it, though by rights it should come to the second son."

Neither understanding nor heeding all this, Violet interrupted by gasping out, "Oh! I am so grieved."

"Grieved! — say that again. Grieved to be Mrs. Arthur Martindale?"

"O no, no; but —"

"Grieved to have found such a fool as to risk everything, and run counter to all his friends for the sake of that silly little ungrateful face?"

She was coaxed out of vexation for the present; but she awoke the next morning with a feeling of culpability and dread of all the Martindale family.

John could not understand her altered manner and the timid bashfulness, greater than even at their first meeting. In fact, the history of his grief inspired her with a sort of reverential compassion for him, and the perception of the terms on which she stood, made her laugh of yesterday seem to her such unbecoming levity, that upon it she concentrated all her vague feelings of contrition.

When he came as before, to borrow some ink; as she gave it to him her hand shook, and her colour rose. After standing musing a little while, she said, mournfully, "I am very sorry!"

"What is the matter?" said he, kindly.

"I am so vexed at what I did yesterday!"

"What do you mean?"

"For laughing," said she, in a tone of distress. "Indeed, indeed, I did not know," and though she averted her face, he saw that the crimson had spread to her neck. He did not at once reply, and she went on incoherently. "I did not know — I could not guess. Of course — I wondered at it all.

I knew I was not fit — but they never told me — O, I am so much grieved."

Most soothingly did John say, coming towards her, "No, no, you need not distress yourself. No one can blame you."

"But Lord Martindale" — she murmured.

"He will look on you like a daughter. I know I may promise you that. Yes, indeed, I have no doubt of it, my dear little sister," he repeated, as she looked earnestly at him. "I have told him how entirely you deserve his kindness and affection, and Arthur has written such a letter as will be sure to bring his forgiveness."

"Ah!" said Violet, "it is all for my sake. No wonder they should be angry."

"Don't fancy that any one is angry with you. We all know that you were ignorant how matters stood."

"But I should have done the same if I had known. I could not have helped it," said Violet.

"I know," said John, "no one could expect it of you. Arthur told me at once that you were free from any shadow of blame, and no one thinks of imputing any."

"But are they very much displeased?" said poor Violet.

"Of course," said John, after a little consideration, "it was a shock to hear of such an important step being taken without my father's knowledge; but he is very anxious there should be no estrangement, and I am sure he will behave as if things had gone on in the usual course. You may have great confidence in his kindness, Violet."

She was somewhat re-assured, and presently went on — "I don't wonder they are vexed. I know how much beneath him I am, but I could not help that. Oh! I wish Matilda was here to tell me how to behave, that every one may not be ashamed of me and angry with him."

"Don't be frightened," said John, "you have pleased two of the family already, you know, and depend upon it, you will make them all like you in time as much as I do."

"If *you* can overlook that laugh!" said Violet.

"I could say I liked you the better for it," said John,

pleasantly; "only I don't know whether it would be a safe precedent. It has made us feel well acquainted, I hope. Don't make a stranger of me," he continued; "don't forget that we are brother and sister."

"I 'm sure," — and she broke off, unable to express herself; then added, "Lady Martindale! I was frightened before at the thought of her, but it is much worse now."

"You must not frighten yourself. You will find out how kind she is when you come to know her, and soon get over your first strangeness and shyness."

"And there is your sister," said Violet; "Theodora — I do long to see her. Is she most like you or your brother?"

"Remarkably like him. She always makes children very fond of her," he added, pausing to find something safe and yet encouraging; "but I don't know half as much of her as Arthur does. We have not been as much together as I could wish."

"I see now why she never wrote," said Violet, with some shame, and yet glad to have it accounted for. "But she will be sure to help me, and tell me how to behave. She will want them to be able to bear me for his sake."

Without much reply, he applied himself to his letter, feeling that he could hardly give an impartial judgment. It had been a great effort to come to visit the bridal pair, but he found himself rewarded in a way he had not expected by the new pleasure given him by her engaging ways; her freshness and artlessness rousing him from long-continued depression of spirits.

After some pondering, she suddenly looked up, and exclaimed, "Well, I 'll try!"

"Try what, Violet?"

"I 'll try to do my very best!" said she, cheerfully, though the tears still were in her eyes. "I know I shall make mistakes, and I can never be like a great lady; but I 'll do the best I can, if they will only bear with me, and not be angry with him."

"I am sure you will do well, with such resolutions."

"One thing I am glad of," added she, "that we came here just now. That old cathedral! I did not think much before — it was all strange and new, and I was too happy. But I shall never be so thoughtless now — or if I am! O, I know," she exclaimed, with renewed energy, "I 'll buy one of those pretty white cups with views of the cathedral on them. Did you not see them in the shop-window? That will put me in mind if I am going to be careless of all my resolutions."

"Resolutions so made are likely to be kept," said John, and she presently left the room, recollecting that her store of biscuits needed replenishing before luncheon. She was putting on her bonnet to go to order them, when a doubt seized her whether she was transgressing the dignities of the honourable Mrs. Martindale. Matilda had lectured against vulgarity when Arthur had warned her against ultra-gentility, and she wavered, till finding there was no one to send, her good sense settled the question. She walked along, feeling the cares and troubles of life arising on her, and thinking she should never again be gay and thoughtless, when she suddenly heard her husband's voice — "Ha! whither away so fast?" and he and Captain Fitzhugh overtook her.

"I was going into the town on an errand."

"Just the moment I wanted you. There's a cricket-match in the College Meads. Come along."

And with her arm in his, Violet's clouds vanished, and she had no recollection of anxieties or vexations. The summer sky was overhead, the river shone blue and bright, the meadows smiled in verdure, the whole scene was full of animation, and the game, of which she knew nothing, was made charming by Arthur's explanations. Nearly an hour had passed before she bethought herself of suggesting it was almost time to go home.

"Presently," said Arthur, "let us see this fellow out."

Another ten minutes, "Would you look at your watch? please. There 's your brother waiting for his luncheon."

"O, ay, 't is nearly time," and he was again absorbed.

She thought he would not be pleased if she went home

alone, nor was she sure of the way; so she waited in much annoyance, till at length he said, "Now, Violet," and they walked briskly home, all that she had endured passing entirely out of her mind.

She rejoiced to find Mr. Martindale unconscious that it was not far from two o'clock. He said he had been glad of time to finish his letters, and Arthur, as his eye fell on one of them, asked, "What is Percy doing now?"

"He has been in Anatolia, going over some of the places we saw together. He has made some discoveries about the Crusades, and is thinking of publishing some of his theories."

"Did I not hear of his writing something before this?"

"Yes; he sent some curious histories of the eastern Jews to some magazine. They are to be published separately, as they have been very successful; but I am glad this book is to be what he calls 'self-contained.' He is too good to be wasted upon periodicals."

Violet, curious to know who was this literary correspondent, glanced at the letter, and read the address, to "Antony Percival Fotheringham, Esquire, British Embassy, Constantinople." She started to find it was the surname of that lost betrothed of whom she thought with an undefinable reverent pity.

All speculations were put to flight, however, by the entrance of the luncheon tray, containing nothing but slices of cold mutton and bread and butter. With a grievous look of dismay, and lamentable exclamation, she began to pour out explanations and apologies; but the gentlemen seemed too intent on conversing about Mr. Fotheringham either to hear her or to perceive anything amiss.

She remembered black looks and sharp words at home; and feeling dreadfully guilty at having failed immediately after her resolutions, she retreated to her room, and there Arthur found her in positive distress.

"Oh, I am so much concerned! It was so wrong to forget those biscuits. Your brother ate nothing else yesterday at uncheon!"

"Is that all?" said Arthur, laughing; "I thought something had happened to you. Come, on with your bonnet. Fancy! John will actually walk with us to St. Cross!"

"Let me first tell you how it happened. There are a couple of ducks —"

"Let them be. No housekeeping affairs for me. Whatever happens, keep your own counsel. If they serve you up a barbecued puppy dog, keep a cool countenance, and help the company round. No woman good for anything mentions her bill of fare in civilized society. Mind that."

Violet was left imagining her apologies a breach of good manners. What must Mr. Martindale think of her? Silly, childish, indiscreet, giggling, neglectful, underbred! How he must regret his brother's having such a wife!

Yet his pleasant voice, and her husband's drawing her arm into his, instantly dispelled all fear and regret, and her walk was delightful.

She was enchanted with St. Cross, delighted with the quadrangle of gray buildings covered with creepers, the smooth turf and gay flowers; in raptures at the black jacks, dole of bread and beer, and at the silver-crossed brethren, and eager to extract all Mr. Martindale's information on the architecture and history of the place, lingering over it as long as her husband's patience would endure, and hardly able to tear herself from the quiet glassy stream and green meadows.

"If Caroline were only here to sketch it!" she cried, "there would be nothing wanting but that that hill should be Helvellyn."

"You should see the mountain convents in Albania," said John; and she was soon charmed with his account of his adventures there with Mr. Fotheringham. She was beginning to look on him as a perfect mine of information — one who had seen the whole world, and read everything. All that was wanting, she said, was Matilda properly to enter into his conversation.

Another day brought letters, inviting Arthur to bring

home his bride for a fortnight's visit, as soon as he could obtain leave of absence.

CHAPTER III.

Who is the bride? A simple village maid,
Beauty and truth, a violet in the shade.
She takes their forced welcome and their wiles
For her own truth, and lifts her head and smiles.
They shall not change that truth by any art,
Oh! may her love change them before they part.
She turns away, her eyes are dim with tears,
Her mother's blessing lingers in her ears,
"Bless thee, my child," the music is unheard,
Her heart grows strong on that remembered word.

FREDERICK TENNYSON.

"HERE we are!" said Arthur Martindale. "Here 's the lodge." Then looking in his wife's face, "Why! you are as white as a sheet. Come! don't be a silly child. They won't bite."

"I am glad I have seen Mr. John Martindale!" sighed she.

"Don't call him so here. Ah! I meant to tell you you must not *Mr. Martindale* me here. John is Mr. Martindale."

"And what am I to call you?"

"By my name, of course."

"Arthur! Oh! I don't know how."

"You will soon. And if you can help shrinking when my aunt kisses you, it will be better for us. Ha! there is Theodora."

"O, where?"

"Gone! Fled in by the lower door. I wish I could have caught her."

Violet held her breath. The grand parterre, laid out in regularly-shaped borders, each containing a mass of one kind of flower, flaming eschochias, dazzling verbenas, azure nemophilas, or sober heliotrope, the broad walks, the great pile of building, the innumerable windows, the long ascent of stone steps, their balustrade guarded by sculptured sphinxes, the lofty entrance, and the tall powdered footmen, gave her the sense of entering a palace.

She trembled, and clung to Arthur's arm, as they came into a great hall, where a vista of marble pillars, orange trees, and statues opened before her; but comfort came in the cordial brotherly greeting with which John here met them.

"She is frigthened out of her senses," said Arthur.

John's reply was an encouraging squeeze of the hand, which he retained, leading her, still leaning on her husband's arm, into a room, where an elderly gentleman was advancing; both her hands were placed within his by her supporters on either side, and he kissed her, gravely saying, "Welcome, my dear." He then presented her to a formal embrace from a tall lady; and Arthur saying, "Well, Theodora! here, Violet," again took her hand, and put it into another, whose soft clasp was not ready, nor was the kiss hearty.

Presently Violet, a little re-assured by Lord Martindale's gentle tones, ventured on a survey. She was on the same sofa with Lady Martindale; but infinitely remote she felt from that form like an eastern queen, richly dressed, and with dark majestic beauty, whose dignity was rather increased than impaired by her fifty years. She spoke softly to the shy stranger, but with a condescending tone, that marked the width of the gulf, and Violet's eyes, in the timid hope of sympathy, turned towards the sister.

But, though the figure was younger, and the dress plainer, something seemed to make her still more unapproachable. There was less beauty, less gentleness, and the expression of the countenance had something fixed and stern. Now and then, there was a sort of agitation of the muscles of the face, and her eyes were riveted on Arthur, excepting that if he looked towards her, she instantly looked out of the window. She neither spoke nor moved; Violet thought that she had not given her a single glance, but she was mistaken, Theodora was observing, and forming a judgment.

This wife, for whose sake Arthur had perilled so much, and inflicted such acute pain on her, what were her merits?

A complexion of lilies and roses, a head like a steel engraving in an annual, a face expressing nothing but childish bashfulness, a manner ladylike but constrained, and a dress of studied simplicity, worse than finery.

Lady Martindale spoke of dressing, and conducted her meek, shy visitor up a grand staircase, along a broad gallery, into a large bedroom, into which the western sun beamed with a dazzling flood of light.

The first use Violet made of her solitude was to look round in amaze at the size and luxury of her room, wondering if she should ever feel at home where looking-glasses haunted her with her own insignificance. She fled from them, to try to cool her cheeks at the open window, and gaze at the pleasure-ground, which reminded her of prints of Versailles, by the sparkling fountain rising high in fantastic jets from its stone basin, in the midst of an expanse of level turf, bordered by terraces and stone steps, adorned with tall vases of flowers. On the balustrade stood a peacock, bending his blue neck, and drooping his gorgeous train, as if he was "monarch of all he surveyed."

Poor Violet felt as if no one but peacocks had a right here; and when she remembered that less than twelve weeks ago the summit of her wishes had been to go to the Wrangerton ball, it seemed to be a dream, and she shut her eyes, almost expecting to open them on Annette's face, and the little attic at home. But then, some one else must have been the fabric of a vision! She made haste to unclose them, and her heart bounded at thinking that he was born to all this! She started with joy as his step approached, and he entered the room.

"Let us look at you," he said. "Have you your colour? Ay, plenty of it. Are you getting tamer, you startled thing?"

"I hope I have not been doing wrong. Lady Martindale asked me to have some tea. I never heard of such a thing before dinner, but I thought afterwards it might have been wrong to refuse. Was it?"

He laughed. "Theodora despises nothing so much as women who drink tea in the middle of the day."

"I am so afraid of doing what is unladylike. Your mother offered me a maid, but I only thought of not giving trouble, and she seemed so shocked at my undoing my own trunk."

"No, no," said he, much diverted; "she never thinks people can help themselves. She was brought up to be worshipped. Those are her West Indian ways. But don't you get gentility notions; Theodora will never stand them, and will respect you for being independent. However, don't make too little of yourself, or be shy of making the lady's maids wait on you. There are enough of them — my mother has two, and Theodora a French one to her own share."

"I should not like any one to do my hair, if that is not wrong."

"None of them all have the knack with it you have, and it is lucky, for they cost as much as a hunter."

"Indeed, I will try to be no expense."

"I say, what do you wear this evening?"

"Would my white muslin be fit?"

"Ay, and the pink ribbons in your hair, mind. You will not see my aunt till after dinner, when I shall not be there; but you must do the best you can, for much depends on it. My aunt brought my mother up, and is complete master here. I can't think how my father" — and he went on talking to himself, as he retreated into his dressing-room, so that all Violet heard was, "wife's relations," and "take warning."

He came back to inspect her toilette and suggest adornments, till, finding he was overdoing them, he let her follow her own taste, and was so satisfied with the result, that he led her before the glass, saying, "There, Mrs. Martindale, that's what I call well got up. Don't you?"

"I don't mind seeing myself when I have you to look at."

"You think we make a handsome couple? Well, I am glad you are tall—not much shorter than Theodora, after all."

"But, oh! how shall I behave properly all dinner-time? Do make a sign if I am doing anything wrong."

"Nonsense!"

"I know I shall make mistakes. Matilda says I shall. I had a letter from her this morning to warn me against 'solecisms in etiquette,' and to tell me to buy the number of the *Family Friend* about dinner parties, but I had not time, and I am sure I shall do wrong."

"You would be much more likely, if you had Matilda and her prig of a book," said Arthur, between anger and diversion. "Tell her to mind her own business — she is not your mistress now, and she shall not teach you affectation. Why, you silly child, should I have had you if you had not been '*proper behaved?*' You have nothing to do but to remember you are my wife, and as good as any of them, besides being twenty times prettier. Now, are you ready?"

"Yes, quite; but how shall I find my way here again?"

"See, it is the third door from the stairs. The rest on this side are spare rooms, except where you see those two green baize doors at the ends. They lead to passages, the wings on the garden side. In this one my aunt's rooms are, and Miss Piper, her white nigger, and the other is Theodora's."

"And all these opposite doors?"

"Those four belong to my father and mother; these two are John's. His sitting-room is the best in the house. The place is altogether too big for comfort. Our little parlour at Winchester was twice as snug as that overgrown drawing-room down stairs."

"Dear little room! I hope we may go back to it. But what a view from this end window! That avenue is the most beautiful thing I have seen yet. It looks much older than the house."

"It is. My father built the house, but we were an old county family long before. The old Admiral, the first lord, had the peerage settled on my father, who was his nephew and head of the family, and he and my aunt Nesbit having been old friends in the West Indies, met at Bath, and cooked up the match. He wanted a fortune for his nephew, and she wanted a coronet for her niece! I can't think how she came

to be satisfied with a trumpery Irish one. You stare, Violet; but that is my aunt's notion of managing, and the way she meant to deal with all of us. She has monstrous hoards of her own, which she thinks give her a right to rule. She has always given out that she meant the chief of them for me, and treated me accordingly, but I am afraid she has got into a desperately bad temper now, and we must get her out of it as best we can."

This not very encouraging speech was made as they stood looking from the gallery window. Some one came near, and Violet started. It was a very fashionably-dressed personage, who, making a sort of patronising sweeping bend, said, "I was just about to send a person to assist Mrs. Martindale. I hope you will ring whenever you require anything. The under lady's maid will be most happy to attend you."

"There," said Arthur, as the lady passed on, "that is the greatest person in the house, hardly excepting my aunt. That is Miss Altisidora Standaloft, her ladyship's own maid."

Violet's feelings might somewhat resemble those of the Emperor Julian when he sent for a barber, and there came a count of the empire.

"She must have wanted to look at you," proceeded Arthur, "or she would never have treated us with such affability. But come along, here is Theodora's room."

It was a cheerful apartment, hung with prints, with somewhat of a school-room aspect, and in much disorder. Books and music lay confused with blue and lilac cottons, patterns, scissors, and papers covered with mysterious dots; there were odd-looking glass bottles on the mantel-shelf, with odder looking things in them, and saucers holding what Violet, at home, would have called messes; the straw-bonnet lay on the floor, and beside it the Scotch terrier, who curled up his lips, showed his white teeth, and greeted the invaders with a growl, which became a bark as Arthur snapped his fingers at him. "Ha! Skylark, that is bad manners. Where 's your mistress? Theodora!"

At the call, the door of the inner room opened, but only a little dark damsel appeared, saying, in a French accent, that Miss Martindale was gone to Miss Gardner's room.

"Is Miss Gardner here?" exclaimed Arthur.

"She is arrived about half an hour ago," was the reply.

Arthur uttered an impatient interjection, and Violet begged to know who Miss Gardner was.

"A great friend of Theodora's. I wish she would have kept further off just now, not that she is not a good-natured agreeable person enough, but I hate having strangers here. There will be no good to be got out of Theodora now! There are two sisters always going about staying at places, the only girls Theodora ever cared for; and just now, Georgina, the youngest, who used to be a wild flyaway girl, just such as Theodora herself, has gone and married one Finch, a miserly old rogue, that scraped up a huge fortune in South America, and is come home old enough for her grandfather. What should possess Theodora to bring Jane here now? I thought she would never have forgiven them. But we may as well come down. Here's the staircase for use and comfort."

"And here is the hall! Oh!" cried Violet, springing towards it, "this really is the Dying Gladiator. Just like the one at Wrangerton!"

"What else should he be like?" said Arthur, laughing. "Every one who keeps a preserve of statues has the same."

She would have liked to linger, recognizing her old friends, and studying this museum of wonders, inlaid marble tables, cases of stuffed humming birds, and stands of hothouse plants, but Arthur hurried her on, saying it was very ill-contrived; a draught straight through it, so that nothing warmed it. He opened doors, giving her a moment's glimpse of yellow satin, gilding and pictures, in the saloon, which was next to the drawing-room where she had been received,

and beyond it the dining-room. Opposite, were the billiard-room, a library, and Lord Martindale's study; and "Here," said he, "is where Theodora and I keep our goods. Ha!" as he entered, "you here, Theodora! Hallo! what's this? A lot of wooden benches with their heels in the air. How is this? Have you been setting up a charity school in my room?"

"I found the children by the wood were too far from school, so I have been teaching them here. I came to see about taking the benches out of your way. I did not expect you here."

"I was showing her our haunts. See, Violet, here 's my double barrel, and here are the bows. I forget if you can shoot."

"Matilda and Caroline do."

"You shall learn. We will have the targets out. Where's the light bow you used to shoot with, Theodora?"

"It is somewhere," said Theodora, without alacrity; "no, I remember, I gave it to Mr. Wingfield's little nephew."

"Unlucky! Yours will never do for those little fingers."

Theodora abruptly turned to Violet, and said, "She must be tired of standing there." Violet smiled with pleasure at being addressed, thanked, and disclaimed fatigue.

"She is of your sort, and does not know how to be tired," said Arthur. "I wondered to hear your bosom friend was here. What brings her about now?"

"If you call her my bosom friend, you answer the question," was the proud reply, and it provoked him to carry on the teasing process.

"I thought she was not *the* friend," he continued; "I ought to have congratulated you on *the* friend's capture. A goldfinch of the South American breed is a rare bird."

Theodora drew up her head, and impetuously heaped some school-books together.

"Have you seen the pretty caged bird?"

"Never."

In a soft tone, contrasting with the manner of his last sayings, Arthur invited his wife to come out on the lawn, and walked away with her. She was surprised and uneasy at what had taken place, but could not understand it, and only perceived he would prefer her not seeming to notice it.

It was all the strange influence of temper. In truth, Theodora's whole heart was yearning to the brother, whom she loved beyond all others; while on the other hand his home attachments centred on her, and he had come to seek her with the fixed purpose of gaining her good-will and protection for his young bride. But temper stepped between. Whether it began from Theodora's jealousy of the stranger, or from his annoyance at her cold haughty manner to his wife, he was vexed, and retaliated by teasing; she answered coldly, in proud suffering at being taunted on a subject which gave her much pain, and then was keenly hurt at his tone and way of leaving her, though in fact she was driving him away. She stood leaning against a pillar in the hall, looking after him with eyes brimming with tears; but on hearing a step approach, she subdued all signs of emotion, and composedly met the eye of her eldest brother. She could not brook that any one should see her grief, and she was in no mood for his first sentences; "What are you looking at?" and seeing the pair standing by the fountain, "Well, you don't think I said too much in her favour?"

"She is very pretty," said Theodora, as if making an admission.

"It is a very sweet expression. Even as a stranger, it would be impossible not to be interested in her, if only for the sake of her simplicity."

Theodora glanced at Violet's dress, and at the attitude in which she was looking up, as Arthur gathered some roses from a vase; then turned her eyes on John's thoughtful and melancholy countenance, and thought within herself, that

every man, however wise, can be taken in by a fair face, and by airs and graces.

"Poor thing," continued John, "it must be very trying; you don't see her to advantage, under constraint, but a few kind words will set her at ease."

He paused for an answer, but not obtaining one, said, "I did not know you expected Miss Gardner to-day."

She surprised him by answering, with asperity, prompted by a second attack on this subject, "I can't help it. I could not put her off, — what objection can there be?"

"Nothing, nothing, — I meant nothing personal. It was only that I would have avoided having spectators of a family meeting like this. I am afraid of first impressions."

"My impressions are nothing at all."

"Well, I hope you will make friends — I am sure she will repay your kindness."

"Do you know that you are standing in a tremendous draught?" interrupted Theodora.

"And there 's my mother on the stairs. I shall go and call them in; come with me, Theodora."

But she had turned back and joined her mother.

He found Violet all smiles and wonder: but she relapsed into constraint and alarm as soon as she entered the drawing-room. Miss Gardner presently came down, — a lady about five or six-and-twenty, not handsome, but very well dressed, and with an air of ease and good society, as if sure of her welcome. As Violet listened to her lively conversation with Lord Martindale, she thought how impossible it was that she should ever be equally at home there.

The grandeur of the dining-room was another shock, and the varieties of courses revived her remorse for the cold mutton. She sat between Lord Martindale and John, who talked to her as soon as he thought she could bear the sound of her own voice; and, with Arthur opposite, her situation was delightful compared to the moment when, without either of her protectors, she must go with the imperial Lady Martindale to encounter the dreaded aunt.

When the time came, Arthur held open the door, and she looked up in his face so piteously, that he smiled, and whispered "You goose," words which encouraged her more than their tenour would seem to warrant.

Warm as it was, the windows were shut, and a shawl was round Mrs. Nesbit's tall, bending, infirm figure. Violet dared not look up at her, and thought, with mysterious awe, of the caution not to shrink if she were kissed; but it was not needed, Lady Martindale only said, "My aunt, Mrs. Arthur Martindale," and Mrs. Nesbit, half rising, just took her hand into her long skinny fingers, which felt cold, damp, and uncertain, like the touch of a lizard.

Violet was conscious of being scanned from head to foot — nay, looked through and through by black eyes that seemed to pierce like a dart from beneath their shaggy brows, and discover all her ignorance, folly, and unfitness for her position. Colouring and trembling, she was relieved that there was another guest to call off Mrs. Nesbit's attention, and watched the readiness and deference with which Miss Gardner replied to compliments on her sister's marriage; and yet they were not comfortable congratulations, thought Violet; at least they made her cheeks burn, and Theodora stood by looking severe and melancholy; but Miss Gardner seemed quite to enter into the sarcastic tone and almost to echo it, as if to humour the old lady.

"Your sister acted very sensibly," said Mrs. Nesbit, with emphasis. "Very good management; though Theodora was somewhat taken by surprise."

"Yes, I know we used her very ill," said Miss Gardner; "but people have unaccountable fancies about publishing those matters. Mr. Finch was in haste, and we all felt that it was best to have it over, so it was talked of a very short time previously."

"Speed is the best policy, as we all know," said Mrs. Nesbit; and Violet felt as if there was a flash of those eyes upon her, and was vexed with herself for blushing. She thought Miss Gardner's answer goodnaturedly unconscious:

"Oh, people always shake together best afterwards. There is not the least use in a prolonged courtship acquaintance. It is only a field for lovers' quarrels, and pastime for the spectators."

"By-the-bye," said Mrs. Nesbit, "what is become of your cousin, Mrs. George Gardner's son?"

"Mark! Oh, he is abroad. Poor fellow, I wish we could find something for him to do. Lady Fotheringham asked her nephew, Percival, if he could not put him in the way of getting some appointment."

"Failed, of course," said Mrs. Nesbit.

"Yes; I never expected much. Those *diplomates* are apt to be afraid of having their heels trodden upon; but it is a great pity. He is so clever, and speaks so many languages. We hope now that Mr. Finch may suggest some employment in America."

"Highly advisable."

"I assure you poor Mark would be glad of anything. He is entirely steadied now; but there are so few openings for men of his age."

An interruption here occurring, Miss Gardner drew off to the window. Theodora sat still, until her friend said, "How lovely it is! Do you ever take a turn on the terrace after dinner?"

Theodora could not refuse. Violet wished they had asked her to join them; but they went out alone, and for some moments both were silent. Miss Gardner first spoke, remarking, "A beautiful complexion."

There was a cold absent assent; and she presently tried again, "Quite a lady," but with the same brief reply.

Presently, however, Theodora exclaimed,

"Jane, you want me to talk to you; I cannot unless you unsay that about Percy Fotheringham. He is not to be accused of baseness."

"I beg your pardon, Theodora, dear; I have no doubt his motives were quite conscientious; but naturally, you know,

one takes one's own cousin's part, and it was disappointing that he would not help to give poor Mark another chance."

"That is no reason he should be accused of petty jealousies."

"Come, you must not be so very severe and dignified. Make some allowance for poor things who don't know how to answer Mrs. Nesbit, and say what first occurs. Indeed, I did not know you were so much interested in him."

"I am interested in justice to the innocent."

"There! don't annihilate me. I know he is a very superior person, the pride of Lady Fotheringham's heart. Of course he would have recommended Mark if he had thought it right; I only hope he will find that he was mistaken."

"If he was he will be the first to own it."

"Then I am forgiven, am I? And I may ask after you after this long solitary winter. We thought a great deal of you."

"I needed no pity, thank you. I was well off with my chemistry and the parish matters. I liked the quiet time."

"I know you do not care for society."

"My aunt is a very amusing companion. Her clear, shrewd observation is like a book of French memoirs."

"And you are one of the few not afraid of her."

"No. We understand each other, and it is better for all parties that she should know I am not to be interfered with. Positively I think she has been fonder of me since we measured our strength."

"There is a mutual attachment in determined spirits," said Miss Gardner.

"I think there must be. I fancy it is resolution that enables me to go further with her than any one else can without offending her."

"She is so proud of you."

"What is strange is, that she is prouder of me than of mamma, who is so much handsomer and more accomplished, — more tractable, too, and making a figure and sensation that I never shall."

"Mrs. Nesbit knows better," said Miss Gardner, laughing.

"Don't say so. If John's illnes had not prevented my coming out last year, I might have gone into the world like other girls. Now I see the worth of a young lady's triumph — the disgusting speculation! I detest it."

"Ah! you have not pardoned poor Georgina."

"Do you wish for my real opinion?"

"Pray let me hear it."

"Georgina had a grand course open to her, and she has shrunk from it."

"A grand course!" repeated Jane, bewildered.

"Yes, honest poverty, and independence. I looked to her to show the true meaning of that word. I call it dependence to be so unable to exist without this world's trash as to live in bondage for its sake. Independence is trusting for maintenance to our own head and hands."

"So you really would have had us — do what? Teach music — make lace?"

"If I had been lucky enough to have such a fate, I would have been a village school-mistress."

"Not even a governess?"

"I should like the village children better; but, seriously, I would gladly get my own bread, and I did believe Georgina meant to wait to be of age and do the same."

"But, Theodora, seriously! The loss of position."

"I would ennoble the office."

"With that head that looks as if it was born in the purple, you would ennoble anything, dear Theodora; but for ordinary —"

"All that is done in earnest towards Heaven and man ennobles and is ennobled."

"True; but it needs a great soul and much indifference to creature comforts. Now, think of us, at our age, our relations' welcome worn out —"

"I thought you were desired to make Worthbourne your home."

"Yes, there was no want of kindness there; but, my

dear, if you could only imagine the dulness. It was as if the whole place had been potted and preserved in Sir Roger de Coverley's time. No neighbours, no club-books, no anything! One managed to vegetate through the morning by the help of being deputy to good Lady Bountiful; but oh! the evenings! Sir Antony always asleep after tea, and no one allowed to speak, lest he should be awakened; and the poor, imbecile son bringing out the draught-board, and playing with us all in turn. Fancy that, by way of enlivenment to poor Georgina after her nervous fever! I was quite alarmed about her, — her spirits seemed depressed for ever into apathy!"

"I should think them in more danger now."

"Oh! her Finch is a manageable bird. Her life is in her own power, and she will have plenty of all that makes it agreeable. It is winning a home instead of working for it; — that is the common sense view —"

"Winning it by the vow to love, honour, and obey, when she knows she cannot!"

"Oh, she may in the end. He is tame, and kind, and very much obliged. My dear Theodora, I could feel with you once; but one learns to see things in a different light as one lives on. After all, I have not done the thing."

"If you did not promote it, you justify it."

"May I not justify my sister to her friend?"

"I do no such thing. I do not justify Arthur. I own that he has acted wrongly; but — No, I cannot compare the two cases. His was silly and bad enough, but it was a marriage, not a bargain."

"Well, perhaps one may turn out as well as the other."

"I am afraid so," sighed Theodora.

"It has been a sad grief to you, so fond of your brother as you were."

"Not that I see much harm in the girl," continued Theodora; "but —"

"But it is the loss of your brother! Do you know, I think it likely he may not be as much lost to you as if he

had chosen a superior person. When the first fancy is over, such a young unformed thing as this cannot have by any means the influence that must belong to you. You will find him recurring to you as before."

Meanwhile, Violet sat formal and forlorn in the drawing-room, and Lady Martindale tried to make conversation. Did she play, or draw? Matilda played, Caroline drew, she had been learning; and in horror of a request for music, she turned her eyes from the grand piano. Was she fond of flowers? O, yes! Of botany? Caroline was. A beautifully illustrated magazine of horticulture was laid before her, and somewhat relieved her, whilst the elder ladies talked about their fernery, in scientific terms, that sounded like an unknown tongue.

Perceiving that a book was wanted, she sprang up, begging to be told where to find it; but the answer made her fear she had been officious. "No, my dear, thank you, do not trouble yourself."

The bell was rung, and a message sent to ask Miss Piper for the book. A small, pale, meek lady glided in, found the place, and departed; while Violet felt more discomposed than ever, under the sense of being a conceited little upstart, sitting among the grand ladies, while such a person was ordered about.

Ease seemed to come back with the gentlemen. Lord Martindale took her into the great drawing-room, to show her Arthur's portrait, and the show of the house — Lady Martindale's likeness, in the character of Lalla Rookh — and John began to turn over prints for her, while Arthur devoted himself to his aunt, talking in the way that, in his schoolboy days, would have beguiled from her sovereigns and bank-notes. However, his civilities were less amiably received, and he met with nothing but hits in return. He hoped that her winter had not been dull.

Not with a person of so much resource as his sister. Solitude with her was a pleasure — it showed the value of a cultivated mind.

"She never used to be famous for that sort of thing," said Arthur.

"Not as a child, but the best years for study come later. Education is scarcely begun at seventeen."

"Young ladies would not thank you for that maxim."

"Experience confirms me in it. A woman is nothing without a few years of grown-up girlhood before her marriage; and, what is more, no one can judge of her when she is fresh from the school-room. Raw material!"

Arthur laughed uneasily.

"There is Mrs. Hitchcock — you know her?"

"What, the lady that goes out with the hounds, and rides steeple-chases? I saw her ride through Whitford today, and she stared so hard into the carriage, that poor Violet pulled down her veil till we were out of the town."

"Well, she was married out of a boarding-school, came here the meekest, shyest, little shrinking creature, always keeping her eyelids cast down, and colouring at a word."

Arthur thought there was a vicious look at his bride's bending head, but he endured by the help of twisting the tassel of the sofa cushion, and with another laugh observed, "that all the lady's shyness had been used up before he knew her."

"Then there was Lord George Wilmot, who ran away with a farmer's daughter. She made quite a sensation; she was quite presentable, and very pretty and well-mannered — but such a temper! They used to be called George and the Dragon. Poor man! he had the most subdued air —"

"There was a son of his in the Light Dragoons —" began Arthur, hoping to lead away the conversation; "a great heavy fellow."

"Exactly so; it was the case with all of them. The Yorkshire farmer showed in all their ways, and poor Lord George was so ashamed of it, that it was positively painful to see him in company with his daughters. And yet the mother was thought ladylike."

Arthur made a sudden observation on John's improved looks.

"Yes. Now that unhappy affair is over, we shall see him begin life afresh, and form new attachments. It is peculiarly important that he should be well married. Indeed, we see every reason to hope that —" And she looked significant and triumphant.

"Much obliged!" thought Arthur. "Well! there's no use in letting one's self be a target for her, while she is in this temper. I'll go and see what I can make of her ladyship. What new scheme have they for John? Rickworth, eh?"

He was soon at his mother's side, congratulating her on John's recovery, and her looks were of real satisfaction. "I am glad you think him better! He is much stronger, and we hope this may be the period when there is a change of constitution, and that we may yet see him a healthy man."

"Has he been going out, or seeing more people of late?"

"No — still keeping in his rooms all the morning. He did drive one day to Rickworth with your father, otherwise he has been nowhere, only taking his solitary ride."

"I never was more surprised than to see him at Winchester!"

"It was entirely his own proposal. You could not be more surprised than we were; but it has been of much benefit to him by giving his thoughts a new channel."

"He likes her, too," said Arthur.

"I assure you he speaks most favourably of her."

"What did he say?" cried Arthur, eagerly.

"He said she was a lady in mind and manners, and of excellent principles; but he declared he would not tell us all he thought of her, lest we should be disappointed."

"Are you?" said Arthur, with a bright, confident smile.

"By no means. He had not prepared me for so much beauty, and such peculiarly graceful movements. My drawing days are nearly past, or I should be making a study of her."

"That's right, mother!" cried Arthur. "What a picture

she would make. Look at her now! The worst of it is, she has so many pretty ways, one does not know which to catch her in!"

Perhaps Lady Martindale caught her aunt's eye, for she began to qualify her praise. "But, Arthur, excuse me, if I tell you all. There is nothing amiss in her manners, but they are quite unformed; and I should dread any contact with her family."

"I never mean her to come near them," said Arthur. "Though, after all, they are better than you suppose. She has nothing to unlearn, and will pick up tone and ease fast enough."

"And for education? Is she cultivated, accomplished?"

"Every man to his taste. You never could get learning to stick on me, and I did not look for it. She knows what other folks do, and likes nothing better than a book. She is good enough for me; and you must take to her, mother, even if she is not quite up to your mark in the ologies. Won't you? Indeed, she is a good little Violet!"

Arthur had never spoken so warmly to his mother, and the calm, inanimate dignity of her face relaxed into a kind response; something was faltered of "every wish to show kindness;" and he had risen to lead his wife to her side, when he perceived his aunt's bead-like eyes fixed on them, and she called out to ask Lady Martindale if Lady Elizabeth Brandon had returned.

The young ladies came in late; and Arthur in vain tried to win a look from his sister, who kept eyes and tongue solely for Miss Gardner's service.

At night, as, after a conversation with his brother, he was crossing the gallery to his own room, he met her.

"Teaching my wife to gossip?" said he, well pleased.

"No, I have been with Jane."

"The eternal friendship!" exclaimed he, in a changed tone.

"Good-night!" and she passed on.

He stood still, then stepping after her, overtook her.

"Theodora!" he said, almost pleadingly.

"Well!"

He paused, tried to laugh, and at last said, rather awkwardly, "I want to know what you think of her?"

"I see she is very pretty."

"Good-night!" and his receding footsteps echoed mortification.

Theodora looked after him. "Jane is right," she said to herself, he cares most for me. Poor Arthur! I must stand alone, ready to support him when his toy fails him."

CHAPTER IV.

They read botanic treatises
And works of gardeners through there,
And methods of transplanting trees
To look as if they grew there.

A. Tennyson.

Theodora awoke to sensations of acute grief. Her nature had an almost tropical fervour of disposition; and her education having given her few to love, her ardent affections had fastened upon Arthur with a vehemence that would have made the loss of the first place in his love painful, even had his wife been a person she respected and esteemed, but when she saw him, as she thought, deluded and thrown away on this mere beauty, the suffering was intense.

The hope, Jane Gardner had given her, of his return to her, when he should have discovered his error, was her first approach to comfort, and seemed to invigorate her to undergo the many vexations of the day, in the sense of neglect, and the sight of his devotion to his bride.

She found that, much as she had dreaded it, she had by no means realized the discomposure she secretly endured when they met at breakfast, and he, remembering her repulse, was cold — she was colder; and Violet, who, in the morning freshness, was growing less timid, shrank back into awe of her formal civility.

In past days it had been a complaint that Arthur left her

no time to herself. Now she saw the slight girlish figure clinging to his arm as they crossed the lawn, and she knew they were about to make the tour of their favourite haunts, she could hardly keep from scolding Skylark back when even he deserted her to run after them; and only by a very strong effort could she prevent her mind from pursuing their steps, while she was inflicting a course of Liebig on Miss Gardner, at the especial instance of that lady, who, whatever hobby her friends were riding, always mounted behind.

Luncheon was half over when the young pair came in, flushed with exercise and animation; Arthur talking fast about the covers and the game, and Violet in such high spirits, that she volunteered a history of their trouble with Skylark, and "some dear little partridges that could not get out of a cart rut."

In the afternoon Miss Gardner, "always so interested in schools and village children," begged to be shown "Theodora's little scholars," and walked with her to Brogden, the village nearly a mile off. They set off just as the old pony was coming to the door for Violet to have a riding lesson; and on their return, at the end of two hours, found Arthur still leading, letting go, running by the side, laughing and encouraging.

"Fools' paradise!" thought Theodora, as she silently mounted the steps.

"That is a remarkably pretty little hat," said Miss Gardner.

Theodora made a blunt affirmative sound.

"No doubt she is highly pleased to sport it. The first time of wearing anything so becoming must be charming at her age. I could envy her."

"Poor old pony!" was all Theodora chose to answer.

"There, they are leaving off," as Arthur led away the pony, and Violet began to ascend the steps, turning her head to look after him.

Miss Gardner came to meet her, asking how she liked riding.

"Oh, so much, thank you."

"You are a good scholar?"

"I hope I shall be. He wants me to ride well. He is going to take me into the woods to-morrow."

"We have been admiring your hat," said Miss Gardner. "It is exactly what my sister would like. Have you any objection to tell where you bought it?"

"I 'll ask him: he gave it to me."

"Dressing his new doll," thought Theodora; but as Violet had not been personally guilty of the extravagance, she thought amends due to her for the injustice, and asked her to come into the gardens.

"Thank you, I should like it; but will he, will Mr. — will Arthur know what has become of me?"

"He saw you join us," said Theodora, thinking he ought to be relieved to have her taken off his hands for a little while.

"Have you seen the gardens?" asked Jane.

"Are not these the gardens?" said Violet, surprised, as they walked on through the pleasure-ground, and passed a screen of trees, and a walk trellised over with roses.

There spread out before her a sweep of shaven turf, adorned with sparkling *jets d'eau* of fantastic forms, gorgeous masses of American plants, the flaming or the snowy azalea, and the noble rhododendron, in every shade of purple cluster among its evergreen leaves; beds of rare lilies, purely white or brilliant with colour; roses in their perfection of bloom; flowers of forms she had never figured to herself, shaded by wondrous trees; the exquisite weeping deodara, the delicate mimosa, the scaly Himalaya pines, the feathery gigantic ferns of the southern hemisphere.

Violet stood gazing in a silent trance till Arthur's step approached, when she bounded back to him, and clinging to his arm exclaimed, so that he alone could hear, "Oh, I am glad you are come! It was too like enchanted ground!"

"So you like it," said Arthur, smiling.

"I did not know there could be anything so beautiful! I

thought the pleasure-ground finer than anything — so much grander than Lord St. Erme's; but this! Did you keep it to the last to surprise me?"

"I forgot it," said Arthur, laughing to see her look shocked. "It is not in my line. The natives never have any sport out of a show-place."

"It is simply a bore," said Theodora; "a self-sacrifice to parade."

"To the good of visitors," replied Miss Gardner, smiling, to Violet, who, fearing her own admiration was foolish, was grateful to hear her say, "and in that capacity you will allow Mrs. Martindale and me to enjoy."

"Did not I bring you to make the grand tour?" said Theodora. "Come, prepare to be stifled. Here are all the zones up to the equator," and she led the way into the conservatory.

Arthur's protection and his satisfaction in Violet's pleasure set her at ease to enter into all the wonders and beauties; but he did not know one plant from another, and referred all her inquiries to his sister, who answered them in a cold matter of fact way that discouraged her from continuing them, and reduced her to listening to the explanations elicited by Jane Gardner, until a new comer met them, thus greeted by Arthur — "Ah! here is the authority! Good morning, Harrison. Mrs. Martindale wants to know the name of this queer striped thing."

He bowed politely, and Violet, as she bent and smiled, supposed they were too familiar for "the hand-shake," while he went on to name the plant and exhibit its peculiarities. Her questions and remarks seemed to please him greatly, and while he replied graciously with much curious information, he cut spray after spray of the choicest flowers and bestowed them upon her, so that when the tour was completed, and he quitted them, she said, with smiling gratitude, "It is the most exquisite bouquet I ever saw."

"A poor thing," was the proud humility answer, "but honoured by such hands!"

"Well done, Harrison!" ejaculated Arthur, as soon as he was out of ear-shot.

"Who is he?" asked Violet, still blushing; then, as the truth dawned on her, "can he be the gardener? I thought him some great botanist allowed to study here."

"Pray tell Miss Piper, Theodora," said Arthur. "If it goes round to him, Violet will never want for flowers."

"It is so exactly what he considers himself," said Jane.

"Except his being allowed," said Arthur. "'T is we that are there on sufferance."

Miss Piper was seen advancing on the same walk, and Violet was uncomfortable, dreading to see her treated as an inferior; but to her great satisfaction, Arthur addressed the little lady in his cordial manner, and Theodora congratulated her on being out of doors on this fine evening.

"Mrs. Nesbit wished me to ask Mr. Harrison for a frond of the new Trichomanes," said Miss Piper.

"You will find him somewhere near the forcing-house," said Theodora; "but pray don't hurry in. I am going to my aunt's room, and you should go and look at the Japan lilies, they are fine enough to make even me admire them." Then running after her to enforce her words, "mind you stay out — be quite at rest till dinner-time — I have scarcely been with my aunt to-day. I am sure a walk will do you good."

The kind solicitude went deep into the affections of the lonely little woman. Violet longed for anything like such notice; then, in a state between wonder, delight, and disappointment, went to her room to attempt a description of the fairy land which she had been visiting, and to enjoy the splendours by thinking how much it would gratify her mother and sisters to hear of her sharing them.

Mrs. Nesbit greeted Theodora with exclamations on Miss Piper's tardiness, and she explained in the authoritative way which she alone ventured to use towards her aunt; then, in a tone of conciliation, spoke of the garden and the beauty of the Japan lilies.

"Harrison grows too many; they are losing their rarity, and look like a weed."

"They are hardy, are they not?" said Theodora, maliciously. "I shall get some for my school garden."

"That is your way of making everything common, and depreciating all that is choice."

"No," said Theodora, "I would have beauty as widely enjoyed and as highly appreciated as possible."

"And pray, if all privileges are extended to the lower classes, what is left to the higher orders?"

"Themselves," said Theodora, proudly. "No, aunt, we only lower ourselves by exclusiveness. It is degrading to ourselves and our tastes to make them badges of vanity. Let them be freely partaken, we shall be first still. The masses cannot mount higher without raising us."

"A levelling theory," said Mrs. Nesbit.

"No, exalting. Has Latin and Greek made Harrison a gentleman? Can even dress in better taste make Pauline look as much a lady as Miss Piper?"

"There is a good deal in that," said Mrs. Nesbit. "Even Lady Elizabeth Brandon cannot hide her good blood, though she does her best to do so."

"And so does Emma," said Theodora.

"Foolish girl," said Mrs. Nesbit, "I would have given anything to see her attractive."

"Too late now!" said Theodora, with a look of repressed scorn and triumph.

"Too late for *Arthur*," replied Mrs. Nesbit, with emphasis.

"And you'll never, never succeed in the other quarter!"

"Young people always have those fancies. I know what you would say, but John is not so young now. It is just the time of life when men take a turn. Depend upon it, now he has had his boy's romance, he is not going to play the disconsolate lover for the rest of his life. No! that girl shall never be Lady Martindale."

"Well, I shan't dispute," said Theodora, "but, —"

"Believe when you see," said Mrs. Nesbit.

"And so you mean it to be Emma Brandon," said Theodora, with the same sarcastic incredulity.

"Let me tell you there are things more unlikely. John thinks much of Lady Elizabeth, and is just one of the men to marry a plain quiet girl, fancying she would be the more domestic; and for yourself, you would find Emma very accommodating — never in your way."

"No, indeed," said Theodora.

"Nothing could give your mother more pleasure. It is more than ever important now. What have you seen of Arthur's piece of wax? He seems to have been playing with her all day long."

"Yes, poor fellow," said Theodora, sighing. "However, it might have been worse. I believe she is an innocent child, and very lady-like."

"There is an instance of the effect of your dissemination notions! This would never have happened if every country attorney did not bring up his daughters to pass for ladies!"

"I am glad she is nothing outwardly to be ashamed of."

"I had rather that she was, than for her to have the opportunity of worming herself into favour! Those modest airs and her way of peeping up under her eyelashes seem to make a great impression," said Mrs. Nesbit, with a sneer.

"Really, I think she is simple and shy."

Mrs. Nesbit laughed. "You, too! What has *she* to do with shyness? She has had her lesson; but you are like the rest! Your mamma actually proposing to take her likeness, but I told her it was not to be thought of. There will be plenty to fill her with presumption."

"And papa — what does he think?" said Theodora, who was wont to obtain the family politics from her aunt.

"Oh! men are sure to be caught by a pretty face, and they cannot make enough of her. I thought your father had more sense, but since John has had his ear, everything has been past my management. I cannot bear to see Arthur's cool way — but no wonder. There will be no end to their expectations, treated as they are."

"Then papa means to do something for them?"

"I cannot tell. He may do as he pleases. It is no affair of mine. They cannot touch my property. Your father may try how he likes supporting them."

"He will then?"

"He cannot help it, after having invited them here."

Theodora could no longer bear to hear Arthur thus spoken of, and began to read aloud, relieved in some degree by finding Arthur was not to suffer poverty. If he had been persecuted, she must have taken his part; now she could choose her own line. However, the world must not suppose that she disapproved of his wife, and she was grateful to the unmeaning words amiable and lady-like, especially when she had to speak to Mr. Wingfield. He observed on the lady's beauty, and hoped that the affair was as little unsatisfactory as possible under the circumstances, to which she fully agreed. They proceeded to parish matters, on which they had so much to say to each other, that Violet thus reflected — "Ah! it is just as Mr. Martindale used to sit with me in the window at home! She is going to give up all her grandeur for the sake of this good clergyman! How good she is! If she could only like me one little bit."

For the present this mattered the less to Violet, as she was extremely happy out of doors with her husband, who took up her time so exclusively, that she scarcely saw the rest, except at meals and in the evening. Then, though less afraid of "solecisms in etiquette," she made no progress in familiarity, but each day revealed more plainly how much too lowly and ignorant she was to be ever one of the family.

Mrs. Nesbit was always formidable and sarcastic, alarming her the more because she could not understand her irony, though conscious it was levelled against her; Lady Martindale always chilling in condescending courtesy, and daily displaying more of the acquirements that frightened Violet by their number and extent; Theodora always gravely and coldly polite and indifferent. Miss Gardner was her great resource. Her pleasant manners and ready conversa-

tion were universally liked, and more than once she dexterously helped Violet out of a state of embarrassment, and made a connecting link, through which she ventured to talk to the other ladies.

With the gentlemen she was happier. Lord Martindale was kind in manner, and she improved in the power of speaking to him, while John was, as she knew, her best friend; but she saw very little of him, he lived apart from the family, often not meeting them till dinner-time, and she began to understand Arthur's surprise at his doings at Winchester, when she found that his usual habits were so solitary that his father was gratified if he joined him in a ride, and his mother esteemed it a favour if he took a turn in the garden with her.

The parish church was so distant that the carriage was always used to convey thither the ladies, except Theodora, who ever since her fourteenth year had made it her custom to walk early to the school, and to remain there in the interval between the services. It was believed that she enjoyed a wet Sunday, as an occasion for proving her resolution, now so well-established that no one thought of remonstrance, let the weather be what it might.

The first Sunday of Violet's visit happened to be showery, and in the afternoon, Lord Martindale had gone to John's room to dissuade him from going to church a second time, when, as the door stood open, they heard Arthur's voice in the gallery.

"Hollo! you are not setting out in these torrents!"

"Do let me, please!" returned the pleading note.

"Why, the avenue is a river, and you are not a real goose yet, you know."

"We never did miss church for weather, and it is further off at Wrangerton."

"Nobody is going, I tell you. It is not in common sense. You are as bad as Theodora, I declare."

"I don't mean to be wilful!" said she, piteously; "I won't go if you tell me not, but please don't. I have no Sunday-

book, and nothing to do, and I should feel wrong all the week."

"To be sure you can't smoke a cigar," said Arthur, in a tone of commiseration; "So wilful will to water! Now for an aquatic excursion!"

Their steps and voices receded, and the father and brother looked amused. "A good honest child!" "She will do something with him after all;" and Lord Martindale (for Arthur had made too broad an assertion in declaring no one was going) followed them down, and showed positively paternal solicitude that Violet should be guarded from the rain, even sending to Pauline for a cloak of Miss Martindale's.

It was early when they reached the village, and Lord Martindale, saying he must speak to a workman, took them through a pretty garden to a house, the front rooms of which were shut up; they entered by the back door, and found themselves in a kitchen, where a couple of labouring people were sitting, in church-going trim. While Violet shook off the rain, and warmed herself at the fire, Lord Martindale spoke to the man; and then opening a door, called her and Arthur to look.

There were several rooms, without trace of ever having been inhabited, and not looking very inviting. The view of the park, which Violet would fain have admired, was one gush of rain.

"This might be made something of," said Lord Martindale. "It was built at the same time as the house. There was some idea of Mrs. Nesbit's living here; and of late years it has been kept empty for poor John."

He broke off. Violet wondered if it was to be her abode, and whether those empty rooms could ever be as pleasant as the parlour at Winchester; but no more passed, and it was time to go into church.

After this, Lord Martindale pressed to have their stay prolonged; which Arthur could not persuade his wife to believe a great compliment to her, though she was pleased,

because he was, and because she hoped it was a sign that she was tolerated for his sake. Personally, she could have wished that his leave of absence might not be extended, especially when she found that by the end of the next two months, it was likely that the regiment would be in London, so that she had seen the last of her dear Winchester lodging; but she had so little selfishness, that she reproached herself, even for the moment's wish, that Arthur should not remain to be happy at his own home.

It was a great loss to her that Miss Gardner was going away, leaving her to the unmitigated coldness and politeness of the other ladies. She grieved the more, when, on the last morning, Jane made positive advances of friendship, and talked affectionately of meeting in London.

"My home is with my sister, and we shall be delighted to see you. You will be fixed there, no doubt."

"Thank you. I cannot tell; but I shall be so glad to see you!"

"And I shall be delighted to introduce you to my sister. I know you will be great friends. What a season it will be! Two such sisters as Mrs. and Miss Martindale making their appearance together will be something memorable."

Violet blushed excessively, and made some inarticulate disavowals. She felt it presumption to let her name be coupled with Miss Martindale's, and there was a sense of something dangerous and wrong in expecting admiration.

Miss Gardner only smiled encouragingly at her youthfulness. "I will not distress you, though I look forward to what I shall hear. I shall feel that I have a right to be proud of you, from priority of acquaintance."

"You are very kind; but, please, don't talk so. It is bad, I know, for me."

"You are very right, I quite agree with you. No doubt it is the wisest way; but so very few feel as you do. I wish more were like you, or, indeed, like Theodora, who is positively displeased with me for speaking of her making a sensation."

"Oh! of course she does not care," said Violet. "So very good as she is."

"Appallingly so, some people say," returned Jane, with a peculiar look; "*but*, I know her well, though she was more my sister's friend than mine."

"Then you have known her a long time?"

"All her life. We used to meet every day in London, when she and my sister were two madcaps together, playing endless wild pranks. We used to tell her she ruled the governesses, and no one could control her — nor can —"

"But she is very good," repeated Violet, puzzled.

"Ah! she took a serious turn at about fourteen, and carried it out in her own peculiar way. She has worked out a great deal for herself, without much guidance. She has a standard of her own, and she will not acknowledge a duty if she does not intend to practise it."

"I don't understand," said Violet. "I thought if one saw a duty one must try to practise it."

"I wish all the world went upon your principles," said Miss Gardner, with a sigh. "I am afraid you will find many not half so consistent with their own views as yourself, or Theodora."

"Oh! of course one must fail," said Violet. "One cannot do half one means; but Theodora seems so strong and resolute."

"Ay, no one has been able to cope with her, not even Mrs. Nesbit; who, as a kindred spirit, might have had a chance!"

"Mrs. Nesbit has had a great deal to do with her education?"

"I dare say you have found out the real head of the family. I see you are very acute, as well as very guarded."

"Oh dear! I hope I have said nothing I ought not," cried Violet, in a fright.

"No, indeed, far from it. I was admiring your caution."

Violet thought she had done wrong in betraying her dislike; she knew not how; and trying to ascribe all to shy-

ness, said, "It was so strange and new; I have never been out till now."

"Yes, if you will allow me to say so, I thought you got on admirably, considering how trying the situation was."

"Oh! I was very much frightened; but they are very kind — Mr. Martindale especially."

"Poor Mr. Martindale! I wish he could recover his spirits. He has never held up his head since Miss Fotheringham's death. He is an admirable person; but it is melancholy to see him spending his life in that lonely manner."

"It is, indeed. I often wish anything would cheer him!"

"All the family are devoted to him, if that would comfort him. It is the only point where Lady Martindale is not led by her aunt, that she almost worships him!"

"I thought Mrs. Nesbit was fond of him."

"Did you ever hear that Percy Fotheringham once said of her, 'That woman is a good hater?' She detested the Fotheringham family, and Mr. Martindale, for his engagement. No, he is out of her power, and she cannot endure him; besides, he is a rival authority — his father listens to him."

"I suppose Mrs. Nesbit is very clever."

"She has been one of the cleverest women on earth. She formed her niece, made the match, forced her forward into the very highest society — never were such delightful parties — the best music — every lion to be met with — Lady Martindale herself at once a study for beauty, and a dictionary of arts and sciences — Mrs. Nesbit so agreeable. Ah! you cannot judge of her quite; she is *passée*, broken, and aged, and, poor thing! is querulous at feeling the loss of her past powers; but there used to be a brilliance and piquancy in her conversation that has become something very different now."

Violet thought it most prudent only to remark on Lady Martindale's varied accomplishments.

"She has carried them on much longer than usual. People generally give them up when they marry, but she has

gone on. I am not sure whether it was the wisest course. There is much to be said on both sides. And I have sometimes thought Theodora might have been a little less determined and eccentric, if she had not been left so much to governesses, and if her affections had had more scope for development."

Theodora came in, and Violet blushed guiltily, as if she had been talking treason.

Miss Gardner's object in life, for the present, might be said to be to pick up amusement, and go about making visits; the grander the people the better, adapting herself to every one, and talking a sort of sensible scandal, with a superior air of regret; obtaining histories at one house to be detailed at another, and thus earning the character of being universally intimate. The sentiments of the young bride of Martindale had been, throughout her visit, matter of curiosity; and even this *tête-à-tête* left them guess work. Theodora's were not so difficult of discovery; for, though Jane had never been the same favourite with her as her more impetuous sister, she had, by her agreeable talk and show of sympathy, broken down much of the hedge of thorns with which Theodora guarded her feelings.

"I have been talking to Mrs. Martindale," Jane began, as they went upstairs together. "She is a graceful young thing, and Georgina and I will call on her in London. Of course they will be settled there."

"I don't know," said Theodora. "A notion has been started of his leaving the Guards, and their coming to live at the cottage at Brogden."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Miss Gardner.

"It is not settled, so don't mention it. I doubt how it would answer to set Arthur down with nothing to do."

"I doubt, indeed! I have seen a good deal of families living close together."

"Nothing shall make me quarrel with Arthur, or his wife. You smile, but it needs no magnanimity to avoid disputes with anything so meek and gentle."

"You can't judge of her; a girl of sixteen in a house full of strangers! Give her a house of her own, and she will soon learn that she is somebody. As long as your eldest brother is unmarried, she will expect to be looked upon as the wife of the heir. She will take offence, and your brother will resent it."

"And there will be discussions about her," said Theodora.

"Depend upon it, 't is easier to keep the peace at a distance. Fancy the having to call for her whenever you go out to dinner. And oh! imagine the father, mother, and half-dozen sisters that will be always staying there."

"No, Arthur has not married the whole family, and never means them to come near her."

"There are two words to that question," said Miss Gardner, smiling. "Quiet as she seems now, poor thing! she has a character of her own, I can see, and plenty of discernment. To be so guarded, as she is, at her age, shows some resolution."

"Guarded! has she been saying anything?"

"No, she is extremely prudent."

"Inferring it, then," exclaimed Theodora. "Well, her expectations must be high, if she is not satisfied; one comfort is, the Brogden scheme is only John's and papa's. My aunt can't bear it, because it seems quite to give up the chance of John's marrying."

"Well, Georgina and I will do the best we can for her. I suppose you wish it to be understood that you approve."

"Of course: you can say everything with truth that the world cares for. She is pleasing, and amiable, and all that."

"She will be extremely admired."

"And her head so much turned as to ruin all the sense there may be in it! I hate the thought of it, and of what is to become of Arthur when he wakes from his trance."

"He will find that he has a sister," said Jane, who had learnt that this was the secret of consolation; and, accordingly, a softer "Poor Arthur!" followed.

"And will you write, dear Theodora?"

"I don't promise. I hardly ever write letters."

"And you will not send your love to poor Georgina?"

"I forgive her for having pained and disappointed me. I hope she will be happy, but I am very much afraid she has not gone the right way to be so."

"Am I to tell her so?"

"I dare say you will, but don't call it my message. If she makes a good use of her means, I shall try to forget the way she obtained them."

"I only hope, with your notions, that you will not get into a scrape yourself. I'm a little afraid of that curate."

"We both know better," said Theodora.

Jane departed, and Violet felt as if she had a friend and protector the less. She was sitting forlorn in the great drawing-room, waiting for Arthur, who was trying horses; presently Theodora came in, and with something of compassion, said, "I hope you have an entertaining book there."

"O yes, thank you, *La Vie de Philippe Auguste*. I like it very much; it is as amusing as *Philip Augustus* itself."

"James's novel, you mean?"

"Have you read it?"

"His novels are exactly alike," said Theodora, leaving the room, but checked by the thought that it would be merciful to take her into her room. "No, nonsense," said second thoughts; "I shall have nothing but chatter ever after, if I establish her coming to me when Arthur is out; and if this cottage scheme comes to pass, she will be marching up whenever she has nothing better to do. Give an inch, and she will take an ell."

She was interrupted by a diffident, hesitating call; and, looking back, as she was mounting the stairs, beheld Violet, who changed the appellation into "Miss Martindale."

"Well!" said she, feeling as if her citadel were in jeopardy.

"Would you — would you be so very kind as to lend me a French dictionary?"

"Certainly; I 'll give you one in a moment," said Theodora; with so little encouragement as would have deterred a person bent on gaining the *entrée*. Violet stood meekly waiting till she brought the book, and received it with gratitude disproportionate to the favour conferred.

CHAPTER V.

Some heavy business hath my lord in hand,
And I must know it, else he loves me not.

HENRY IV.

MISS GARDNER'S departure threw the rest of the party more together, and Theodora did not hold herself as much aloof as before. Indeed she perceived that there were occasions when Arthur seemed to be returning to his preference for her. She had more conversation, and it often fell on subjects of which the bride had no knowledge, while the sister was happy in resuming old habits. Sometimes Violet was entertained; but one day when they were riding, the talk was going on eagerly on some subject of which she knew nothing, while they rode faster than she liked, and she fancied she was insecure in her saddle. Twice she timidly called Arthur; but he was too much absorbed to attend to her, without a degree of scream, which she did not feel would be justified. Each moment she grew more alarmed and miserable, and though at last, when he perceived that she wanted him, he was off his horse in a moment and set all to rights, she completely forgot her distress, — the charm had been broken, she was no longer his first thought.

The sensation of loneliness often returned during the next few weeks; there was no real neglect, and she would not so have felt it if she had not depended on him alone, and so long enjoyed his exclusive attention. His fondness and petting were the same, but she perceived that he found in his sister a companionship of which she did not feel capable. But to Theodora herself, whenever she succeeded in engrossing Arthur, it seemed a victory of sisterly affection and sense over beauty and frivolity.

Arthur was anxious to know the family politics, and resumed the habit of depending on his sister for gathering intelligence from Mrs. Nesbit. On her he bestowed his complaints that his father would not see things as he wished, and with her talked over his projects. In truth, he could not bear to disclose to his wife the footing on which he stood, — looking on her as a mere child, sure to be satisfied, and not requiring to be consulted.

Theodora gave him tidings of the proposal that he should settle in the village, and finding him undecided, threw all her weight into the opposite scale. She sincerely believed she was consulting his happiness and the harmony of the family by speaking of the irksomeness of living there with nothing to do, and by assisting him in calculating how large an income would be necessary to enable him to keep hunters, go from home, &c., without which he declared it would be intolerable, and as there was little probability of his father allowing him so much, continuing in his profession was the only alternative.

Violet saw them in frequent consultation, and once John said something to her of his hopes of seeing her at Brogden; then, finding her in ignorance, drew back, but not till he had said enough to make her restless at hearing no more. She would, of course, have preferred living in the country; but when she figured to herself Arthur always with Theodora, and herself shut up in the little parlour she had seen in the rain, she grew extremely disconsolate.

One morning, unable to read or sit quiet under these

anticipations, she went out to dispel them by a turn among the flowers, and a conversation with the peacock. At the corner of the lawn, she heard Arthur's voice — "Exactly so; two thousand is the very least. Ha, Violet!" as he and Theodora emerged from a shady alley.

"Oh, I did not mean to interrupt you," said Violet, confused; "I only came out for some fresh air."

"Unbonneted, too; do you want to get roasted brown?" said Arthur.

"I never am burnt," said Violet; "but I will not be in your way, I'll go."

"Nonsense," said he, drawing her arm into his. "Come in good time," and he yawned, tired of the discussion. "Ha, Mr. Peacock, are you there?"

"He always follows me," said Violet. "Miss Piper showed me where his food is kept, and I can almost get him to eat out of my hand."

Theodora walked off, thinking there was an end of her brother's sense, and Violet looked after her rather sadly, thinking, while exhibiting to Arthur her friendship with the peacock, "he consults her, he only plays with me. Perhaps it is all I am good for; but I wish we were at Winchester."

As Theodora went up-stairs, she saw her eldest brother standing at the south window of the gallery. He called to her, saying, "Here 's a pretty picture, Theodora."

In front of the sparkling crystal arches of the fountain stood Violet, bending forward, and holding out her hand full of grain to invite the beautiful bird, which now advanced, now withdrew its rich blue neck, as in condescension, then raised its crested head in sudden alarm, its train sweeping the ground in royal splendour. Arthur, no unpicturesque figure in his loose brown coat, stood by, leaning against the stand of one of the vases of plants, whose rich wreaths of brightly coloured blossoms hung down, making a setting for the group; and while Violet by her blandishments invited the peacock to approach, he now and then,

with smiling slyness, made thrusts at it with her parasol, or excited Skylark to approach.

"A pretty scene, is it not?" said John.

"Like a Sèvres china cup," Theodora could not help saying.

"Fountain and peacock, and parasol for shepherd's crook, forming a French Arcadia," said John, smiling. "I suppose it would hardly make a picture. It is too bright."

Theodora only answered by a sigh, and was turning away, when John added, "I am glad she has him at last, I was afraid she had a long solitary morning while you were out with him. I saw you walking up and down so long."

"He was talking over his plans," said Theodora, with an assumption of sullen dignity.

"I have been wishing to speak to you about that very thing," said John. "I think you may be in danger of putting yourself between him and his wife."

It was a new thing to her to hear that this was a danger; but, in an offended manner, she replied, "I can hardly be accused of that. He ceases all rational talk about his most important concerns to go to child's play with her."

"But why keep her out of the rational talk?"

"That is his concern. He knows what she is capable of, I suppose."

"I doubt whether he does," said John; "but I don't want to interfere with his behaviour, only to give you a caution. It is natural that you should wish to have him what he was before. I know his marriage was a great blow to you."

"I knew he would marry," said Theodora, coldly; for she could not bear compassion. "It is the common course of things."

"And that the wife should be first."

"Of course."

"Then would it not be better to bear that in mind, and make up your mind to it, rather than try to absorb his confidence?"

"He is not bound to consult no one but that child. You would not drive him back to her if he came to you for advice."

"I should not pass her over; I should assume that her opinion was to be respected."

"I can't be untrue."

"Then try to make it valuable."

"He wants no help of mine to make him fond of her!" cried Theodora. "Does not he dote on her, and make himself quite foolish about her complexion and her dress?"

"That is a different thing. She cannot be always a toy; and if you want to do the most inestimable service to Arthur, it would be by raising her."

"Trying to educate a married sister-in-law! No, thank you!"

"I don't see what is to become of them," said John, sadly. "He will be always under some influence or other; and a sensible wife might do everything for him. But she is a child; and he is not the man to form her character. He would have spoilt her already if she did not take his admiration for mere affection; and just at the age when girls are most carefully watched, she is turned out into the world without a guide! If he ceases to be happy with her, what is before them? You think he will fall back on you; but I tell you he will not. If you once loosen the tie of home, and he seeks solace elsewhere, it will be in the pursuits that have done him harm enough already."

"He has given up his race-horses," said Theodora.

The luncheon-bell interrupted them; but as they were going down, John added, "I hope I have said nothing to vex you. Indeed, Theodora, I feel much for your loss."

"I am not vexed," was her haughty reply, little guessing how, in her pursuit of the brother who had escaped her, she was repelling and slighting one who would gladly have turned to her for sisterly friendship. His spirits were in that state of revival when a mutual alliance would have greatly added to the enjoyment of both; but Theodora had no idea

of even the possibility of being on such terms. He seemed like one of an elder generation — hardly the same relation as Arthur.

"So, Lady Elizabeth comes," said Lady Martindale, as they entered the room.

"Is she coming to stay here?" asked John.

"Yes; did you not hear that we have asked her to come to us for the Whitford ball?"

"Oh, are we in for the Whitford ball?" said Theodora, in a tone of disgust that checked the delighted look on Violet's face.

"Yes, my dear; your papa wishes us to go."

"What a bore!" exclaimed Theodora.

"Yes," sighed Lady Martindale: "but your papa thinks it right."

"A necessary evil — eh, Violet?" said Arthur.

"I hope you don't mind it?" said Violet, looking anxiously at him.

"Ah, you will enjoy it," said her ladyship, graciously regarding her folly.

"Oh, yes, thank you," said Violet, eagerly.

"Have you been to many balls?"

"Only to one;" and she blushed deeply, and cast down her eyes.

"And so the Brandons are coming to stay! For how long, Mamma?" proceeded Theodora.

"From Wednesday to Saturday," said Lady Martindale. "I have been writing cards for a dinner party for Wednesday; and your father says there are some calls that must be returned; and so, my dear, will you be ready by three?"

"You don't mean me, Mamma?" said Theodora, as nobody answered.

"No; you are a resolute rebel against morning visits. You have no engagement for this afternoon, my dear?"

Violet started, saying, "I beg your pardon; I did not know you meant me. Oh, thank you! I am very much obliged."

"I suppose you will not go with us, Arthur?"

He looked as if he did not like it, but caught a beseeching glance from his wife, and was beginning to consent, when Theodora exclaimed, "Oh, Arthur, don't; it will be such a famous opportunity for that ride."

"Very well; you know where my cards are, Violet!"

"Yes," she answered, submissively, though much disappointed, and in dread of the drive and of the strangers.

"Really, I think you had better go, Arthur," said John, greatly displeased at Theodora's tone. "It is the sort of occasion for doing things regularly."

"Indeed, I think so," said Lady Martindale; "I wish Arthur would go with us this once. I doubt if it will be taken well if he does not."

"You will find no one at home. His going won't make a bit of difference," said Theodora, who now regarded keeping him as a matter of power.

"Surely your ride might wait," said her mother.

"No, it won't, Mamma. It is to see that old man, Mary's father."

"What Mary, my dear?"

"The scullery-maid. I want to speak to him about her confirmation; and the only way is over Whitford Down — all manner of leaping-places, so we must go without Violet."

Violet feared there was little hope for her, for Arthur looked much invited by the leaping-places; but John made another effort in her favour, and a great one for him.

"Suppose you accept of me for your escort, Theodora?"

Every one looked astonished, Lady Martindale positively aghast.

"Were you ever on Whitford Down, John?" said Arthur.

"Why, yes, — in old times; I know the place, I believe."

"You talk of knowing it, who never hunted!" said Arthur. "No, no; you are a great traveller, John; but you don't know the one-horse track on Whitford Down that does not lead into a bog —"

"Theodora does, I dare say."

"Yes, I know it; but it is too far for you, John, thank you, and not at all what would suit you. I must give it up, if Arthur prefers playing the disconsolate part of a gentleman at a morning call."

"Do you really dislike going without me?" asked Arthur, and of course nothing was left for Violet to say but, "O, thank you, pray don't stay with me. Indeed, I had much rather you had your ride."

"You are sure?"

"O yes, quite. I shall do very well," and she smiled, and tried to make a show of ease and confidence in his mother, by looking towards her, and asking upon whom they were to call."

Lady Martindale mentioned several ladies who had left their cards for Mrs. Arthur Martindale, adding that perhaps it would be better to leave a card at Rickworth Priory.

"Is that where Lady Elizabeth Brandon lives?" asked Violet.

"Yes," said Lady Martindale. "It belongs to her daughter. Lady Elizabeth is a highly excellent person, for whom Lord Martindale has a great regard, and Miss Brandon is one of Theodora's oldest friends."

"Hum!" said Theodora.

"My dear, she is a very nice amiable girl — just your own age, and admirably brought up."

"Granted," said Theodora.

"I cannot see that Emma Brandon wants anything but style and confidence," proceeded Lady Martindale, "and that I believe to be entirely poor Lady Elizabeth's fault for keeping her so much in retirement. That German finishing governess, Miss Ohnglaube, whom we were so sorry to lose, would have been the person to teach her a little freedom and readiness of manner. I wish we could have kept her a little longer."

"I told Lady Elizabeth about her," said Theodora; but Lady Martindale, without hearing, said she must go to her aunt, and renewing injunctions to Violet to be ready by three, left the room.

"You did not astonish her weak mind with the ghost story?" said Arthur.

"With its cause."

"You would not have thought, Violet," continued Arthur, "that we had a ghost in the north wing."

"What was it?" said Violet. "You don't mean really?"

"Only a Turk's-head broom, with phosphorus eyes, and a sheet round the handle," said Theodora. "It had a grand effect when Arthur stood on the second landing-place, and raised it above the balusters — a sort of bodilessness rising from vacancy."

"Didn't she faint?" said Arthur.

"No, I was afraid she would, and then it would have been all over with us; but I dragged her safe into the schoolroom, and there she was so hysterical that I nearly relented."

"Then was it all in play?" said Violet.

"In earnest," said Arthur. "It was the only way of getting quit of mademoiselle."

"That lady who used to talk metaphysics and sing?" said John. "I remember the lamentations at her not choosing to remain. Why was she victimized?"

"There was no help for it," said Theodora. "She considered the book of Genesis as a *sehr schöne mythische Geschichte*, and called the Patriarchs the Hebrew Avatars."

"Theodora! You don't mean it!" exclaimed John.

"I do, but I had my revenge, for, after the Turk's-head adventure, she never slept without my Bible under her pillow. If by broad daylight she would have renounced the Avatar theory, I really would have forgiven her, for she was very good-natured, and she admired 'the high Roman fashion' so much, I was half afraid she might follow it herself if we tormented her much more."

"But why keep it to yourself? I can hardly believe it possible! Why play these tricks instead of telling all?"

"I did tell aunt Nesbit, but Miss Ohnglaube was always reading Jean Paul with her and mamma; they were in rap-

tures with her, and my aunt only said I was too well instructed to be misled."

"How old were you?"

"About fifteen."

"It is beyond belief. Why could you not tell my father?" said John.

"I hardly saw him — I never spoke to him."

"Was not I at home?"

"Yes, shut up in your room. I never thought of speaking to *you*. All I could do was to be as restive as possible, and when she did not care for that, there was nothing for it but playing on her German superstition. So Arthur told her some awful stories about whipping blacks to death, and declared West Indian families were very apt to be haunted; but that it was a subject never to be mentioned to mamma nor my aunt."

"And having paved the way, we treated her to the Turk's-head," concluded Arthur; "I would do it again to hear her sigh and scream, and see Theodora acting as coolly as if she was in daily intercourse with the defunct nigger. If mademoiselle had not been frightened out of her senses, her self-possession would have betrayed us."

"I could not act fright," said Theodora.

"And this was the best plan you could devise for getting rid of an infidel governess!" said John.

And as they dispersed, he stood looking after his sister, thinking that there was more excuse for her inconsistencies than he had yet afforded her, and that, in fact, she deserved credit for being what she was. His aunt had done even more harm than the ruin of his happiness.

Theodora triumphed, and carried Arthur off, but Violet found the reality of the expedition less formidable than the anticipation. She knew her mother would have enjoyed seeing her well dressed, and setting forth in that style; the drive was agreeable, and Lady Martindale kind and gracious. Alone with her, she lost much of her dread, and felt

better acquainted; but all froze up into coldness when they came home.

The ladies at Rickworth had not been at home; and as they did not arrive on the Wednesday till Violet had gone to dress, she had time to frighten herself by imagining an heiress on the pattern of Lady Martindale, and an earl's daughter proportionably unapproachable. Her trepidation was increased by Arthur's not coming in, though she heard guests arriving, and when at last he appeared, it was so late, that he desired her to go down and say he was "just ready."

It was a serious thing to encounter alone that great saloon full of strangers, and with cheeks of the brightest carnation, Violet glided in, and after delivering her message to Lord Martindale, was glad to find herself safely seated on an ottoman, whence she looked for the chief guests. In the distance, beside Lady Martindale, sat a quiet elderly lady in black; Theodora was paying a sort of scornful half-attention to a fine showy girl, who was talking rather affectedly; and, thought Violet, no one but an heiress could wear so many bracelets.

Her survey completed, she became conscious that a small, fair-haired, pale girl was sitting near her, looking so piteously shy and uncomfortable, that she felt bound to try and set her at ease, and ventured an observation on the weather. It was responded to, and something about the harvest followed; then, how pretty the country, and, thereupon, Violet said it only wanted mountains to be beautiful.

"Ah! when one has once seen a mountain one cannot forget it."

"Never!" said Violet. "I miss Helvellyn every morning when I look out of window."

"Do you know the Lake country?" said the young lady.

"My home — my old home — is within sight of the Westmoreland hills. Have you been there?"

"Mamma and I once spent a month there, and enjoyed it exceedingly."

"Oh! and did you go up Helvellyn?"

"Yes, that we did, in spite of the showers; and what a view we had!"

They were surprised to find that dinner had been announced. Violet was placed next to Mr. Martindale, and was able to ask the name of her new acquaintance.

"Miss Brandon, you mean."

"O no, not Miss Brandon, but that light pale girl in the lilac worked muslin, who was talking to me."

"I saw you talking to Miss Brandon."

"Could it be? She looked all astray and frightened, like me!"

"That description answers to Emma Brandon," said John, smiling.

"Who would have thought it! I should never have begun talking to her if I had guessed who she was. I only did it because she looked so uncomfortable. I hope it was not being forward."

"Not in the least. You know you are at home here, — it was a great kindness."

"Do you like her?" said Violet.

"I believe she is a very good kind of girl, and her mother is one of our oldest friends. They are very excellent sensible people, and do a great deal of good in their own parish."

"And only think! She has been in Westmoreland! She has seen Helvellyn!"

Violet was the only person who ever spoke to John in that hearty confidence of sympathy in rejoicing; and quite refreshed by her bright looks, he led her into a history of an ascent of Helvellyn, which had, until this spring, been the great event of her life.

On coming into the drawing-room, Miss Brandon shrank up to her mother's side. Violet wished she had a mother to protect her; and not daring to place herself among the great ladies, stood in the group of younger ones, with whom Theodora was keeping up a cold formal converse. Country

neighbours thought much of being asked to Martindale; but the parties there were of the grandest and stiffest. Moreover, every one had to give their friends a description of the bride; and the young ladies were more inclined to study her appearance than to find conversation, regarding her as an object of curiosity, as well as with some of their general dread of the house of Martindale.

After an awkward ten minutes, Lady Martindale came towards her, and said, "My dear, Lady Elizabeth Brandon wishes to be introduced to you."

"To me!" and Violet followed her, blushed and bent, then found her hand cordially shaken, and a most comfortable voice addressing her. Room was made for her on the sofa, between Lady Elizabeth and her daughter, and she was supremely happy in talking about her own dear lake country. Arthur smiled, and looked well pleased to see her in such company; and Mr. Martindale came and talked to Lady Elizabeth all the evening.

Violet expected Theodora to monopolize Miss Brandon the next morning, but Theodora had reasons of her own for not breaking her habit of spending the morning in her own occupations. She knew Lady Elizabeth to be perfectly guiltless of manœuvring; but from the time she had become conscious of Mrs. Nesbit's designs on Rickworth, first for Arthur and now for John, it had been her decided purpose to give no colour for throwing the heiress in their way by any friendship of hers; and as she considered Emma one of the dullest and most silly girls of her acquaintance, it was very pleasant to be justified in neglecting her.

The office of companionship to the younger visitor fell to Mrs. Martindale. She showed off the peacock, and they wandered happily in the gardens, most amiably received by Mr. Harrison, who delighted in displaying his treasures, and almost overwhelmed Violet with his graciousness, when she shyly asked if he could spare her a few of his white roses for her hair.

Miss Brandon groaned and sighed about the ball, de-

elaring it her detestation; she should be tired to death; she hated dancing; and above all, there was the nuisance of dressing.

"Oh! I am sorry you don't like it," said Violet; "but that is the way with all sensible people."

"No; mamma says it is not being sensible, but because I don't dance well, and she wishes I did."

"I am glad of that. My mamma does not think it foolish."

"Do you like dancing, then?"

"That I do," cried Violet, making a few steps, "I only wish I might dance with him still!"

This was the only difference of opinion — on school-teaching books — heroes, historical and fictitious — on the *Bridal of Triermain* — and Wordsworth's *Waggoner*, their sentiments accorded exactly. Perhaps Emma's mind was the more formed and cultivated, but Violet's was the more discerning and diffident in judgment.

Emma took the first opportunity of pouring out to her mother a perfect rapture about Mrs. Martindale, dwelling on her right views, and all that showed she had been well brought up.

"She is a sweet-looking creature," said Lady Elizabeth, "and I do hope she is all she seems. Lord Martindale has been telling me how entirely the marriage was her father's doing, and that she was perfectly ignorant and innocent, poor thing."

"She looks as if she could never do anything wrong. Mamma, I hardly know whether you would like me to make friends with her, but I could not help it, and she said such nice things that I knew you would like her. I never could get on with any one before, you know, but, from the moment she came blushing in, and spoke to me in that sweet low voice, I felt as if I must be fond of her — before I made out who she was — and even then I could not like her less."

"She is so unaffected and unassuming!" said Lady Eliza-

beth. "I little expected Arthur Martindale's marriage to have turned out so well."

"I don't wonder at his falling in love at first sight! I don't see how he could help it. I am sure I should!"

"I think you have," said Lady Elizabeth, smiling.

"Wasn't it charming, Mamma? Theodora never came near us all the morning, and very soon got out of my way in the afternoon, so we were so comfortable!"

"Take care what you say about her, my dear."

"O, yes. We never spoke of her at all. I wonder what Mrs. Martindale does here! It is a dreadful place, and they are all one more stately than the other."

"Not the sons."

"Oh! poor Mr. Martindale is worse than stately. There's something in that gentle melancholy tone of his that is so different from other people — and he looks so refined and thoughtful. He frightens me more than any of them!"

"I hope he is in rather better spirits. I have had a good deal of talk with him this evening. Indeed, his father told me he had been roused by all this affair about his brother. But, Emma, my dear, you have not rung all this time! Here am I almost dressed. I shall have to fulfil my threat, and leave you to come down alone."

It had to be fulfilled. Emma left insufficient time for her maid to try to set out her soft light scanty hair, to make her satin and gauze look anything but limp and flabby, and to put on her jewels, in the vain hope of their making her seem well dressed. Whatever was ordained for her to wear, Emma always looked exactly the same. She opened her door at the same moment as Violet advanced into the gallery, her tall taper figure arrayed in bridal lace, not much whiter than her long neck and rounded arms, a wreath of roses around her dark tresses, brilliant flowers in her hand, her soft eyes bright with pleasure, and her beauteous complexion deepened by bashfulness.

Emma could not repress her delight. "Oh!" she exclaimed, "you can't think how beautiful you are!"

"Isn't she?" said a proud, playful voice. "Thank you;" but seeing Emma disconcerted, Arthur hastened down stairs.

"O, I didn't know he was there!"

"Never mind!" said Violet, among her blushes. "I 'm glad he was. He liked it."

"I could not help it," said Emma. "You are so like a story! I can hardly believe you are real!"

Violet felt familiar enough to prove herself substantial by a playful pinch. "But look here! See what I found on my table."

"One of those serpent bracelets. It is very pretty!"

"Was not it kind of Lord Martindale?"

"You have to thank him for it! Oh! dreadful!"

"I don't mind speaking to him. It is so kind. 'Mrs. A. Martindale, from her affectionate father,' the direction said. Oh! it is so very, very pleasant that he should be so kind to me. Is not it a beautiful creature? Look at it, its scales and its crown and eyes. Arthur says they are sapphires."

"Yes, I never saw a prettier one."

"I wish Annette could see it, and all at home. Is it not like a creature in a fairy tale?"

"Like Zelinda's singing serpents?"

"Just like them. Do you know, I sometimes think I have got into a fairy tale. Everything is so beautiful and so bewildering, and unlike what I fancied."

"Because you are so like a fairy princess yourself. Are you sure you have not a talisman ring?"

"I think I have," and Violet pulled off her glove.

"There — that forget-me-not — the first ring I ever had. From the day he gave me that, it has all been so strange, that now and then I have been almost afraid to awake, for fear it should not be true. But may I look at that diamond butterfly of yours! It shines as if it would flash in the dark."

"Never mind mine. Stupid things that came as heirlooms, and have no pleasure belonging to them. The only

thing I do care for is this" — and she drew out a locket from within her dress. "There, that is my father's hair, and that is my little brother's. They both died before I can remember, and there is dear mamma's nice pepper-and-salt lock round them."

Theodora swept by in black lace, her coronal of hair wreathed with large pearls, and her lofty air like the Tragic Muse.

"Comparing ornaments! Worthy of such a friendship," thought she, as she held back, and made them go down before her, Emma glad to hold by Violet's arm for protection.

Mrs. Nesbit was in the drawing-room talking to Lady Elizabeth, and with her keen piercing eyes watching John, who was reading the newspaper by the table. She was pleased to see him lay it aside, look up, and smile, as the two friends entered, but she could have beaten them both, the one for her insignificance, and the other for her radiant loveliness, and she was still further provoked to see Miss Brandon sit down as near her mother as possible, while Violet went up to him to show him her bracelet. She stood by him for some little time while he was examining and praising it, and congratulating her on the choice bouquet that Harrison had bestowed on her, but surprised to see her eyes cast pensively down, and a grave look on that fair young face. He little suspected that she was saddened by the contrast between her joys and his sorrow and ill health, and thought it unkind to speak of her delight to one so far removed from it.

Theodora began to indulge in a hearty grumbling.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Nesbit, "you will only show yourselves there, and go home. Miss Brandon is not more inclined to Whitford balls than you are."

"No, I am rather surprised at having dragged Emma so far," said Lady Elizabeth. "I hope they will both find it turn out better than they expect. You must teach them," and she looked smilingly at Violet.

Mrs. Nesbit was extremely annoyed at the quantity of notice Violet had lately received, and was the more resolved

to put her down. "No one can expect them to like country balls," she said. "One attends them as a duty, for the sake of the neighbourhood; but as to pleasure in them, that is only for the young ladies of the place on the look-out for the military."

She had fulfilled her purpose of making every one uncomfortable, except one — namely, Violet. John looked at her, and perceived she was too innocent and clear in conscience to understand or appropriate the taunt, so he thought it better to leave the field open to Lady Elizabeth's calm reply, "Well, I used to enjoy country balls very much in my time."

Arthur evaporated his irritation by shaking his foot, and murmuring, not so low but that his sister heard it, "Old hag!"

Lord and Lady Martindale came in together, and Violet's blushing gratitude was so pretty and bright that it made Lord Martindale smile, and silence it by a kiss, which perhaps surprised and gratified her more than the bracelet did.

Lady Elizabeth begged to have her in her carriage; and growing intimate in the sociable darkness, she found out that the mother was as loveable as the daughter, and was as much at home with them as if she had known them for years.

The evening exceeded even Violet's anticipations, though her one former ball had been such as could never be equalled. Lord Martindale wished every one to know how entirely he accepted his new daughter, so he gave his arm to her, and presented her to the principal ladies, while she felt herself followed by her husband's encouraging and exulting eye. It certainly was a very different thing to go into society as Miss Violet Moss or as Mrs. Arthur Martindale, and there was a start of fear as the thought crossed her — was her pleasure pride and vanity?

She was chiefly sorry that she could not see Miss Brandon enjoy herself, — all that could be extracted from her by the most animated appeal, was a resigned smile, and a little quizzing of some of the sillier young ladies. She professed, however, that she had never disliked any ball so little, since

she had the pleasure of watching Mrs. Martindale, hearing how universally she was acknowledged to be the prettiest person present, and telling Arthur all that was said of her.

Miss Brandon and Arthur had for some years past kept at a respectful distance, each in dread of designs of the other, but now they were fast resuming the childish familiarity of tone of the ancient times, when the rough but good-natured, gentleman-like boy had been a companion much preferred to the determined, domineering girl. They danced a quadrille; talked a great deal of Violet. Emma began to think much better of his capacity.

As to Theodora, she was talking, laughing, dancing, and appearing so full of spirits, that Violet could not help venturing a remark, that she surely liked it better than she expected.

"Not at all," was the answer; "but if one is to make one's self absurd, it is as well not to do so by halves."

So far was she from doing so by halves, that when her mother was ready to go home, she was engaged so many deep, that it was settled she should be left with Arthur and Violet. She danced indefatigably till morning shone into the room, and was handed into the carriage by a gentleman who, it was the private opinion of her young chaperone, had, like Arthur, fallen in love at first sight. Poor man! it was a pity he could not know about Mr. Wingfield; or she could almost suppose that Theodora did not care so much for Mr. Wingfield, after all.

The drive home was very amusing. Violet was so tired, that it was a trouble to speak; but she liked to hear the brother and sister discuss the ball, and laugh over the people; and leant back in her corner so comfortably, that she only dreaded the moment of rousing herself to walk upstairs.

Theodora never stopped talking all the way, sprung nimbly out of the carriage, ran up the steps, and admired the morning sky; and Violet believed she did not go to bed at all, for it seemed a very short time before the distant notes

of the singing class were heard; yet she looked as fresh and blooming as ever when they met at breakfast, and did not flag in any of her usual employments.

The other ladies were capable of nothing but loitering; and it was a day for making great advances in intimacy. Most delightful was that first friendship, as they wandered arm-in-arm, talked gravely, or gaily, and entered more and more into each other's minds. Theodora held aloof, despising their girlish, caressing ways, and regarding the intimacy with the less toleration because it was likely to serve as a pretext to Mrs. Nesbit for promoting her views for John; and though the fewest words possible had passed between him and Miss Brandon, she found that Mrs. Nesbit was building hopes on the satisfaction he showed in conversing with Lady Elizabeth. The visit ended with a warm invitation to Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Martindale, to come and stay at Rickworth before they left the country.

CHAPTER VI.

Is it that they have a fear
Of the dreary season near,
Or that other pleasures be
Sweeter even than gaiety?

WORDSWORTH.

WERE they to leave the country? This was still under consideration. The next fortnight made some difference in Theodora's wishes respecting Brogden Cottage. Violet becoming less timid, ventured to show that she took interest in poor people; and Theodora was pleased by finding her able to teach at school, and to remember the names of the children. Especially her sweet looks and signs gained the heart of little Charley Layton, the dumb boy at the lodge — the creature on whom Theodora bestowed the most time and thought. And on her begging to be shown the dumb alphabet, as the two sisters crossed fingers, they became, for one evening, almost intimate.

Theodora began to think of her as not only harmless, but

likely to be useful in the parish; and could afford to let Arthur have her for a plaything, since he made herself his confidante. She withdrew her opposition; but it was too late. Arthur had declared that he could not live there without 2500 *l.* a-year, and this his father neither could nor would give him. The expense of building the house, and the keeping up of such a garden and establishment, did not leave too much available of the wealth Lady Martindale had brought, nor was the West Indian property in a prosperous state; the demand was preposterous; and Theodora found herself obliged to defend poor Violet, who, her aunt declared, must have instigated it in consequence of the notice lavished upon her; while, as Theodora averred with far more truth, "it was as much as the poor thing did to know the difference between a ten-pound note and a five." Twelve hundred pounds a-year, and the rent of a house in London, was what his elder brother would have married upon; and this, chiefly by John's influence, was fixed as the allowance, in addition to his pay; and as his promotion was now purchased for him, he had far more than he had any right to expect, though he did not seem to think so, and grumbled to Theodora about the expense of the garden, as if it was consuming his patrimony.

How the income would hold out, between his carelessness and her inexperience, was a question over which his father sighed, and gave good advice, which Arthur heard with the same sleepy, civil air of attention, as had served him under the infliction many times before.

John gave only one piece of advice, namely, that he should consign a fixed sum for household expenses into his wife's hands; so that he might not be subject to continued applications.

On this he acted; and subtracting to himself, wine, men, and horses, the full amount of his bachelor income, he, for the first time, communicated to Violet the result of the various consultations.

"So the upshot of it all is, that we are to have a house somewhere in Belgravia," he began.

"That is near Lord Martindale's London house, is it not?"

"Yes; you will be in the way of all that is going on."

"Do we go there next month?"

"I suppose so."

"Oh! I am glad."

"Are you? I thought you liked being here."

"Yes, yes, of course, that I do; but it will be so pleasant to be at home, and to have you all to myself." She repented the next moment, as if it had been a complaint; but he was gratified, and called her a little monopolist.

"Oh, I don't mean to be troublesome to you," said she, earnestly; "I shall have so much more to do in our own house, that I shall not miss you so much when you are out; besides, we can have Annette to stay with us."

"We'll see about that. But look here," laying a paper with some figures before her; "that's all my father leaves me for you to keep house with. I put it into your hands, and you must do the best you can with it."

"You don't mean to put all that into my hands!" exclaimed Violet in alarm. "What a sum!"

"You won't think so by the end of the year; but mind, this must do; it will be of no use to come to me for more."

"Then is it little?" asked Violet.

"See what you think of it by and by; you won't find it such an easy thing to make both ends meet."

"I will write and ask mamma to tell me how to manage."

"Indeed," said Arthur, with sharpness such as she had never seen in him before, "I beg you will not. I won't have my affairs the town talk at Wrangerton." But seeing her look frightened, and ready to cry, he softened instantly, and said affectionately, "No, no, Violet, we must keep our concerns to ourselves. I don't want to serve for the entertainment of Matilda's particular friends."

"Mamma wouldn't tell —"

"I'll trust no house of seven women."

"But how am I to know how to manage?"

"Never mind; you'll get on. It comes as naturally to women, as if it was shooting or fishing."

"I wonder how I shall begin! I don't know anything."

"Buy a cookery book."

"Aunt Moss gave me one; I didn't mean that. But, oh, dear, there's the hiring servants, and buying things!"

"Don't ask me: it is woman's work, and always to be done behind the scenes. If there's a thing I mortally hate, it is those housekeeper bodies who go about talking of their good cooks."

Violet was silenced; but after much meditation she humbly begged for answers to one or two questions. "Was she to pay the servants' wages out of this?"

"Your maids — of course."

"And how many are we to have?"

"As many as will do the work."

"A cook and housemaid — I wonder if that would be enough?"

"Don't ask me, that's all."

"I know you don't like to be teased," she said, submissively; "but one or two things I do want to know. Is James to be in the house?"

"Why, yes; he is a handy fellow. We will have him down for Simmonds to give him some training."

"Then ought we to have two maids or three?"

He held up his hands, and escaped.

That morning John, happening to come into the drawing-room, found Violet disconsolately covering a sheet of paper with figures.

"Abstruse calculations?" said he.

"Yes, very," said she, sighing, with the mystified face of a child losing its way in a long sum.

He did not like to leave her in such evident difficulties, and said, with a smile, "Your budget? Are you good at arithmetic?"

"I can do the sums, if that was all; but I don't know what to set out from, or anything about it. Mamma said she could not think how I should keep house."

"She would be the best person to give you counsel, I should think."

"Yes, but —" and she looked down, struggling with tears, "I must not write to ask her."

"How so?"

"Arthur says the Wrangerton people would gossip, and I should not like that," said she; "only, it is very hard to make out for myself, and those things tease Arthur."

"They are not much in his line," said John; "I don't know," he added, hesitating, "whether it would be of any use to you to talk it over with me. There was a time when I considered the management of such an income; and though it never came to practice, mine may be better than no notions at all."

"Oh, thank you!" said Violet, eagerly; then, pausing, she said, with a sweet embarrassment, "only — you can't like it."

"Thank you," replied he, with kind earnestness; "I should like to be of use to you."

"It is just what I want. I am sure Arthur would like me to do it. You see this is what he gives me; and I am to buy everything out of it."

"The best plan," said John; "it never answers to be always applying for money."

"No," said Violet, thoughtfully, as she recollected certain home scenes, and then was angry with herself for fancying Arthur could wear such looks as those which all the house dreaded.

Meanwhile John had perceived how differently Arthur had apportioned the income from what his own intentions had been. He had great doubts of the possibility of her well doing, but he kept them to himself. He advised her to consider her items, and soon saw she was more bewildered than helpless. He knew no more than Arthur on the knotty point

of the number of maids, but he was able to pronounce her plan sensible, and her eyes brightened, as she spoke of a housemaid of mamma's who wanted to better herself, and get out of the way of the little ones, "who were always racketing."

"And now," said John, "we passed over one important question — or is that settled otherwise — your own pocket-money!"

"Oh! I have plenty. Arthur gave me 50*l.* when we went through London, and I have twelve left."

"But for the future! Is it included here?"

"I should think so. Oh!" shocked at the sum he set down, "a quarter of that would be enough for my dress."

"I don't think Miss Standaloft would say so," said John, smiling.

"But Arthur said we must economize, and I promised to be as little expense as possible. Please let me write down half that."

"No, no," said John, retaining the pencil, "not with my consent. Leave yourself the power of giving. Besides, this is to cover all the sundries you cannot charge as household expenses. Now let me mark off another hundred for casualties, and here is what you will have for the year. Now divide."

"Surely, two people and three servants can't eat all that in one week."

"Fires, candles," said John, amused, but poor Violet was quite overpowered.

"Oh, dear! how many things I never thought of! Mamma said I was too young! These coals. Can you tell me anything about them?"

"I am afraid not. You are getting beyond me. If you wanted to know the cost of lodgings in Italy or the south of France, I could help you; but, after all, experience is better bought than borrowed."

"But what shall I do? Suppose I make Arthur uncomfortable, or spend his money as I ought not when he trusts me?"

"Suppose you don't," said John. "Why should you not become an excellent housewife? Indeed, I think you will," he proceeded, as she fixed her eyes on him. "You see the principle in its right light. This very anxiety is the best pledge. If your head was only full of the pleasure of being mistress of a house, that would make me uneasy about you and Arthur."

"Oh! that would be too bad! Mamma has talked to me so much. She said I must make it a rule never to have debts. She showed me how she pays her bills every week, and gave me a great book like hers. I began at Winchester."

"Why, Violet, instead of knowing nothing, I think you know a great deal!"

She smiled, and said something about mamma.

"I don't say you will not make mistakes," he continued, "but they will be steps to learn by. Your allowance is not large. It seems only fair to tell you that it may not be sufficient. So, if you find the expenses exceed the week's portion, don't try to scramble on; it will only be discomfort at the time, and will lead to worse. Go boldly to Arthur, and make him attend; it is the only way to peace and security."

"I see," said Violet, thoughtfully. "O, I hope I shall do right. One thing I should like. I mean, I thought one ought to set apart something for giving away."

"That is one use in reserving something for yourself," said John, in his kindest manner. "Of the rest, you are only Arthur's steward."

"Yes, I hope I shall manage well."

"You will if you keep your present frame of mind."

"But I am so young and ignorant. I did not think enough about it when I was married," said Violet, sorrowfully, "and now it seems all to come on me? To have all his comfort and the well-being of a whole house depending on such as I am."

"I can only say one thing in answer, Violet, what I know was the best comfort to one who, without it, would have

sunk under the weight of responsibility." His whole countenance altered, his voice gave way, a distressing fit of coughing came on, the colour flushed into his face, and he pressed his hand on his chest. Violet was frightened, but it presently ceased, and after sitting for a few moments, exhausted, with his head resting on his hand, he took up the pencil, and wrote down — "As thy day, so shall thy strength be" — pushed it towards her, and slowly left the room.

Violet shed a few tears over the paper, and was the more grieved when she heard of his being confined to his room by pain in the side. She told Arthur what had passed. "Ah! poor John," he said, "he never can speak of Helen, and any agitation that brings on that cough knocks him up for the rest of the day. So he has been trying to *insense* you, has he? Very good-natured of him."

"I am so grieved. I was afraid it would be painful to him. But what was the responsibility he spoke of?"

"Looking after her grandfather, I suppose. He was imbecile all the latter part of his life. Poor John, they were both regularly sacrificed."

John took the opportunity of a visit from his father that afternoon to tell him how much good sense and right feeling Violet had shown, and her reluctance to appropriate to herself what he had insisted on as absolutely necessary.

"That is only inexperience, poor girl," said Lord Martindale. "She does not know what she will want. If it is not confidential, I should like to know what she allows herself."

John mentioned the sum.

"That is mere nonsense!" exclaimed his father. "It is not half as much as Theodora has! And she living in London, and Arthur making such a point about her dress. I thought you knew better, John!"

"I knew it was very little, but when I considered the rest, I did not see how she could contrive to give herself more."

"There must be some miscalculation," said Lord Martindale. "There is not the least occasion for her to be

straitened. You thought yourself the allowance was ample."

"That it is; but you know Arthur has been used to expensive habits."

"More shame for him."

"But one can hardly expect him to reduce at once. I do think he is sincere in his promises, but he will be careless, even in ordinary expenditure. I don't say this is what ought to be, but I fear it will be. All the prudence and self-denial must be upon her side."

"And that from a girl of sixteen, universally admired! What a business it is! Not that I blame her, poor thing, but I don't see what is to become of them."

The conversation was not without results. Lord Martindale, some little time after, put into Violet's hand an envelope, telling her she must apply the contents to her own use; and she was astounded at finding it a cheque for 100*l*. He was going to London, with both his sons, to choose a house for Arthur, and to bid farewell to John, who was warned, by a few chilly days, to depart for a winter in Madeira.

Violet was, during her husband's absence, to be left at Rickworth; and in the last week she had several other presents, a splendid dressing-case from Lady Martindale, containing more implements than she knew how to use, also the print of Lalla Rookh; and even little Miss Piper had spent much time and trouble on a very ugly cushion. Theodora declared her present should be useful, and gave all the household linen, for the purpose of having it hemmed by her school-children; — and this, though she and Miss Piper sat up for three nights till one o'clock to hasten it, was so far from ready, that Captain and Mrs. Martindale would have begun the world without one table cloth, if old aunt Moss had not been hemming for them ever since the day of Arthur's proposal.

Theodora was weary and impatient of the conflict of influence, and glad to be left to her own pursuits, while she

thought that, alone with Violet, Arthur must surely be brought to a sense of his mistake.

Violet's heart bounded at the prospect of a renewal of the happy days at Winchester, and of a release from the restraint of Martindale, and the disappointment of making no friends with the family, — Mr. Martindale was the only one of them with whom she was sorry to part; and she had seen comparatively little of him. Indeed, when the three gentlemen set out, she thought so much of Arthur's being away for a week, that she could not care for John's voyage to Madeira, and looked pre-occupied when he affectionately wished her good-bye, telling her to watch for him in the spring, — her house would be his first stage on his return. Then, as he saw her clinging to Arthur to the last moment, and coming down with him to the bottom of the long steps, he thought within himself, "And by that time there will be some guessing how much strength and stability there is with all that sweetness, and she will have proved how much there is to trust to in his fondness!"

There was not much time for bewailing the departures before Emma Brandon came to claim her guest; and the drive was pleasant enough to make Violet shake off her depression, and fully enjoy the arrival at Rickworth, which now bore an aspect so much more interesting than on her former drive.

The wooded hills in the first flush of autumn beauty sloped softly down to the green meadows, and as the carriage crossed the solid-looking old stone bridge, Violet exclaimed with transport, at a glimpse she caught of a gray ruin — the old priory! She was so eager to see it that she and Emma left the carriage at the park gate, and walked thither at once.

Little of the building remained, only a few of the cloister arches, and the stumps of broken columns to mark the form of the chapel; but the arch of the west window was complete, and the wreaths of ivy hid its want of tracery, while a red Virginian creeper mantled the wall. All was calm and

still, the greensward smooth and carefully mown, not a nettle or thistle visible, but the floriated crosses on the old stone coffin lids showing clearly above the level turf, shaded by a few fine old trees, while the river glided smoothly along under the broad floating water-lily leaves, and on its other side the green lawn was repeated, cattle quietly grazing on the rich pasture, shut in by the gently rising woods. The declining sun cast its long shadows, and all was peace, — the only sounds, the robin's note and the ripple of the stream.

Violet stood with her hands resting on Emma's arm, scarcely daring to break the silence. "How lovely!" said she, after a long interval. "O Emma, how fond you must be of this place!"

"Yes, it is beautiful," said Emma, but with less satisfaction than Violet expected.

"It is worth all the gardens at Martindale."

"To be sure it is," said Emma, indignantly.

"It puts me in mind of St. Cross."

"But St. Cross is alive, not a ruin," said Emma, with a sigh, and she asked many questions about it, while showing Violet the chief points of interest, where the different buildings had been, and the tomb of Osyth, the last prioress. Her whole manner surprised Violet, there was a reverence as if they were actually within a church, and more melancholy than pleasure in the possession of what, nevertheless, the young heiress evidently loved with all her heart.

Turning away at length, they crossed the park, and passed through the garden, which was gay with flowers, though much less magnificent than Mr. Harrison's. Emma said, mamma was a great gardener, and accordingly they found her cutting off flowers past their prime. She gave Violet a bouquet of geranium and heliotrope, and conducted her to her room with that motherly kindness and solicitude so comfortable to a lonely guest in a strange house.

Not that the house could long seem strange to Violet. It was an atmosphere of ease, where she could move and

speak without feeling on her good behaviour. Everything throughout was on an unpretending scale, full of comfort and without display, with a regularity and punctuality that gave a feeling of repose.

Violet was much happier than she had thought possible without Arthur, though her pleasures were not such as to make a figure in history. They were talks and walks, drives and visits to the school, readings and discussions, and the being perfectly at home and caressed by mother and daughter. Lady Elizabeth had all the qualities that are better than intellect, and enough of that to enter into the pursuits of cleverer people. Emma had more ability, and so much enthusiasm that it was well that it was chastened by her mother's sound sense, as well as kept under by her own timidity.

It was not till Violet was on the point of departure that she knew the secret of Emma's heart. The last Sunday evening before Arthur was to fetch her away, she begged to walk once more to the Priory, and have another look at it. "I think," said she, "it will stay in my mind like Helvellyn in the distance."

Emma smiled, and soon they stood in the mellow light of the setting sun, beside the ruin. "How strange," said Violet, "to think that it is three hundred years since Sunday came to this chapel."

"I wonder," said Emma, breaking off, then beginning, "O Violet, it is the wish of my heart to bring Sundays back to it."

"Emma! but could it be built up again?"

"Mamma says nothing must be done till I am twenty-five — almost six years hence. Not then, unless I am tame and sober, and have weighed it well."

"Restore it? — build a church?"

"I could have a sort of alms-house, with old people and children, and we could look after them ourselves."

"That would be delightful. Oh, I hope you will do it."

"Don't think of it more than as a dream to myself and

mamma. I could not help saying it to you just then; but it is down too deep generally even for mamma. It must come back somehow to God's service. Don't talk of it any more, Violet, dearest, only pray that I may not be unworthy."

Violet could hardly believe a maiden with such hopes and purposes could be her friend, any more than Prioress Osyth herself; and when, half an hour afterwards, she heard Emma talking over the parish and Sunday-school news in an ordinary matter-of-fact way, she did not seem like the same person.

There were many vows of correspondence, and auguries of meeting next spring. Lady Elizabeth thought it right that her daughter should see something of London life, and the hope of meeting Violet was the one thing that consoled Emma, and Violet talked of the delight of making her friend and Annette known to each other.

To this, as Lady Elizabeth observed, Arthur said not a word. She could not help lecturing him a little on the care of his wife, and he listened with a very good grace, much pleased at their being so fond of her.

She wished them good-bye very joyously, extremely happy at having her husband again, and full of pleasant anticipations of her new home.

PART II.

There's pansies for you, that's for thoughts.
Winter's Tale.

CHAPTER I.

How far less am I blest than they,
Daily to pine, and waste with care,
Like the poor plant, that from its stem
Divided, feels the chilling air.
MICKLE's *Cumnor Hall.*

ARTHUR and Violet arrived at their new home in the twilight, when the drawing-room fire burnt brightly, giving a look of comfort. The furniture was good; and by the fire stood a delightful little low chair with a high back, and a pretty little rosewood work-table, on which was a coloured glass inkstand, and a table-stand of books in choice bindings.

"Arthur, Arthur, how charming! I am sure this is your doing."

"No, it is John's; I can't devise knick-knackeries, but he is a thorough old bachelor, and has been doing all sorts of things to the house, which have made it more tolerable."

"How very kind he is! The books — how beautiful! Just what I wanted. That one he lent me — he talked to me of that. This Emma has — I saw your sister reading that, and wished to see more of it. But I can't look at them all now; I must see Sarah, she was to bring something from home."

A Wrangerton face had great charms, though it was starched and severe, without one smile in answer to the joyous greeting, "Well, Sarah, I am glad you could come. How are they all?"

"Thank you, Ma'am, Mr. and Mrs. Moss, and the young ladies, and Mr. Albert, are all very well, and desires their love," replied a voice solemn enough for the announcement that they were all at the point of death. Violet's spirits would have been damped but for the sight of the table spread with parcels directed in dear familiar writing, and she was pouncing on them when Sarah began her grave requests for orders, and Violet felt her own ignorance and incapacity growing more patent every moment as questions about arrangements beset and tormented her on every side. At last she was left to enjoy the out-spreading of the precious gifts, the devices characteristic of the kind hands that had prepared them, and all her own private possessions — a welcome sight.

It was a happy evening, and the days that followed were full of pleasure and occupation — in settling her treasures and making purchases. When she seated herself in her own carriage, she thought now indeed it would be delightful to show herself to her mother and sisters. She had no relation in London but an uncle, a solicitor, fond and proud of her, but too sensible to wish to frequent her house. He gave her a silver teapot; and being asked to dinner now and then on Sunday was all the attention he required. Her brother Albert did, indeed, sometimes come to town on business; and Violet, after many hopes, was, one evening, charmed at seeing him make his appearance. Arthur asked him to stay to dinner, after which they were going to a party.

Albert, a spruce, good-looking youth, had been too grand to make friends with so young a sister; but, now that she was a person of consequence, his tone was different. He talked his best, and she had a perfect feast of Wrangerton news — showed him all her presents, and enjoyed the thought of Annette's smile at hearing of her little Violet stepping into her carriage for a party at a countess's.

Arthur said London was empty, but Violet thought her visitors innumerable, and, as the autumn advanced towards winter, had many invitations. She enjoyed going out; her

shyness had nearly worn off; and she was everywhere received so as to make Arthur proud and pleased. Indeed she had doubts whether she was not growing too gay, and if it was right to pay so much attention to her appearance. She asked Arthur, and was laughed at for her pains.

However, Violet was not without her troubles from the first. She was very much afraid of Sarah, and never spoke to her without shrinking back into Miss Violet, and being conscious that it was mere presumption in her to try to order one so much wiser than herself. The cook, a relation of Miss Standaloft, was much more smooth and deferential, full of resources, which seemed to come from Mrs. Martindale herself; and though the weekly bills always exceeded her reckonings, so many things were wanting, as Mrs. Cook observed, just getting into a house. The first time of having any guests at dinner, Violet was in much anxiety, but all went off to general satisfaction until the bills came in on Monday morning. The cost was beyond her calculations, exceeded her week's portion, and devoured the savings of the days when they had not dined at home. Invitations had been sent out for another party, and Violet tried to bring it within bounds; but the cook was civilly superior — "It was always so in the first families, such as she was accustomed to, but if Mrs. Martindale liked to have things in a different style —"

She knew Arthur would consent to no external change, and all she could do was to look at the price of all she ordered, reject sundry expensive delicacies, and trust to living on the relics of the feast for the rest of the week; but, behold! they scarcely served for one luncheon, and on Monday the bills had mounted up in an inexplicable manner. There were no savings left, and she made up the deficiency from her own resources.

A third party was impending, and she strove more resolutely for frugality. "Well, Ma'am, if you choose, it must be so; but it was not what I was used to in the families such as I have lived in."

But Violet was firm, whereupon the cook harassed her with contrarieties; and late hours and London air had so far told upon her that she could not shake off her cares cheerfully. She knew all would turn out ill — tormented herself — brought on a head-ache, and looked unwell when the evening came. The cook sent up the dinner with just enough want of care to keep her in such continual apprehension that she could hardly attend to the conversation.

"You did not make such a good hand of it to-day," said Arthur, when the guests were gone; "that soup was ditch-water, and —"

Violet was so worn out that she burst into tears.

"Hey? What 's the matter now? I said nothing to cry for."

She tried to speak, but the tears would not let her.

"Well, if you can't bear to be told everything is not perfection, I don't know what is to be done." And Arthur, in displeasure, took up a candle and walked off to smoke a cigar in his sitting-room down stairs.

Her tears were checked by consternation, and, earnest to be forgiven, she followed; then, as he turned impatiently, said, in a trembling pleading voice, "Dear Arthur, I 've done crying. I did not mean to be cross."

"Well, that 's enough, never mind," said he, not unkindly, but as if in haste to dismiss the subject, and be left to the peaceful enjoyment of his cigar.

"And you forgive me?"

"Forgive? nonsense — only don't begin crying about nothing again. There 's nothing more intolerable than for a woman to be always crying, whenever one speaks to her."

"'T was not so much that," said Violet, meekly, "as that I was vexed at the dinner not looking well, and it won't, without spending such quantities of money!"

"Quantities — what do you call quantities?"

She named the cost of the last dinner, and he laughed at her horror; then, when she was going to prove that it was

disproportionate to their means, he silenced her: "Well, well, never mind; we are not going to give any more dinners just yet; but when we do, have done with pinching and squeezing. Why, you don't look fit to be seen after it."

"I 'm only tired."

"Ay, with worrying. Go to bed and to sleep, and forget it all!"

She was consoled for that time; but the perplexity continued. She strove to reduce the ordinary expenditure, but Arthur had a fashion of bringing home a friend to dinner without notice; and she underwent indescribable miseries, while reflecting on her one chicken, or five mutton chops; and though something was sure to be extemporized by the cook, the result was, that these casual guests were as expensive as a banquet. She ventured to beg Arthur to tell her when he was going to ask any one, but he was vexed, and said be liked to bring home a man by chance; there need be nothing out of the common way, and a dinner for two was a dinner for three. Poor Violet thought, "Ah! this is not like the time at Winchester. It is my own fault, I am not companion enough."

She began to grow tired of going out in the evening; late hours tried her; she felt listless and unwell; and her finances could not support the dress expenses: but when she tried to excuse herself, she found Arthur determined on taking her out, though he had previously grumbled, and declared he only went for her sake. When she looked pale and languid he seemed annoyed, in a way that gave her the impression that he valued nothing but her beauty. She believed he found home dull, and her not what he expected.

The truth was, perhaps, that Violet's spirits were naturally not strong, and she was scarcely equal to the cares that had come on her. She missed the companionship of the large family at home; and a slight degree of indisposition or of anxiety was sufficient to set her tormenting herself with every imaginable fear and grief; above all, the dread that he was not pleased with her.

She believed herself to have strictly adhered to the rule of paying for everything at once; but she was dismayed by a shower of bills at Christmas, for things ordered by the cook without her knowledge, several of which she disowned altogether; and several that her memory and "great book" both declared she had paid; though the tradesmen and the cook, through whom the money had been sent, stoutly denied it. She was frightened, paid the sums, and so went the last remains of Lord Martindale's present.

Sure that the woman was dishonest, yet not knowing how to prove it; afraid to consult Arthur on the household concerns, that he detested; and with a nervous dread of a disturbance, Violet made arrangements for conveying no more payments through Mrs. Cook; and, for the rest, thought she must go on as she could, till the time should come when, near the end of May, she reckoned on having her mother with her. She would repair her mistakes, make her feel herself mistress in her own house, and help her to all she wanted to know, without fear of Wrangerton gossip. That hope strengthened and cheered her in all her troubles; and oh! suppose Annette came too!

Poor Violet! the first time she referred to her mother's coming, Arthur looked annoyed, gave a sort of whistle, and said, as if searching for an excuse, "Why, they never could spare her from Wrangerton."

"O, that they would," said Violet, eagerly; "or if not mamma herself, at least, I am sure, Matilda would come to me, or Annette."

"Whew!" again whistled Arthur; "I don't know whether that will do."

"Arthur!"

"There will be my mother close by, and Lady Elizabeth. No, no, you won't want to have any one up from there."

"May I not have my own mamma?" pleaded poor Violet, urged into something like pertinacity.

But Arthur cut her short; his great dislike to what he had to say making him speak the more ungraciously: "I

don't want to vex you, Violet, but once for all we must come to an understanding. You must not expect to have your family here. They are good sort of people, and all that style of thing," — he faltered at her looks of imploring consternation, and tried to work himself into anger in order to be able to finish. "It is of no use looking wretched, I tell you, you must put it out of your head. They belong to a different set altogether, and it won't do any way. There now, don't go and be nervous about yourself; Theodora shall see to you, and you 'll do very well, I have no doubt."

With these words he hastily quitted her, that he might not witness the distress he had occasioned, though he had not the least idea what his refusal was to her.

The sense of her own helplessness and inexperience, and the prospect of illness, without mother or sister, were lost in the more overpowering sorrow at his unkindness. How could he love her if he denied her this at such a time, and in such a manner. "He is ashamed of my family! ashamed of me! He is disappointed in me! I can't make it pleasant to him at home. I am not even good-tempered when I am not well, and I am not half as pretty as I used to be! Oh! if he had but married me for anything but my prettiness! But I was not worth vexing every one for! I am only a plague and trouble! Well, I dare say I shall die; now there is no one to take care of me, and then, perhaps, he will be sorry for me. Just at last, I 'll tell him how I did mean to be a good wife, and tried all I could."

But then poor Violet fell into a maze of terror.

She roused herself and dried her tears on hearing some one approaching. It was James, bringing in a parcel. It contained a beautiful and costly silk dress. After the first glance she pushed it from her, and her grief burst forth again. "Does he think *that* can make up to me for my mother? How silly he must think me. Yet he is kind and tries to please me still, though I am so troublesome! Dear, dear Arthur!"

She took it back upon her lap, and tried to admire, but

her heart failed her; and she could not look at it till the sound of his entrance revived her; she felt as if she had been injuring him, and recalling her smiles, met him with what he thought delighted gratitude.

He was relieved to find the late subject blown over, and only wishing to keep it out of her mind, he invited her to take a walk.

Violet had begun to dread his walks, for he was a loiterer, apt to go further and stay out longer than he intended, and she could not bear to tease him by hints of fatigue; but to-day she could not demur at anything he asked, and she only observed that they had better not go far, as they had an engagement for the evening.

At first the air and his attention did her good; but when she saw Captain Fitzhugh approaching, she knew that Arthur's arm was the only further use she should have of him, and there would be an endless sauntering and talk about horses or fishing, while he would all the time fancy himself going home.

The consequence was, that she was obliged to go at once to bed on coming in, and was declared by Arthur to have been very silly never to have mentioned her fatigue; while Sarah, bestowing grim and sour looks upon them both, attended on her with the most assiduous and minute care. Arthur was greatly concerned, and very unwilling to go to the party alone, but Violet persuaded him, and he promised to return early; then found the evening pleasant, and never knew how time went, while she was lying awake, imagining that something dreadful had happened to him, and mourning over her grievances.

The effects of that over fatigue did not pass away, and she was forced to give up all evening engagements. He meant to be kind, but was too ignorant and inconsiderate not to do her as much harm as good. One day he almost overwhelmed her with attentions, the next left her to herself. He offered to refuse all invitations for her sake, but it ended in her spending more than half her evenings alone; and when

the horse was wanted for him in the evening, she lost her drive. Very soon she fell out of the habit of going out, for now that she was no companion for his long rambles, he found other ways of disposing of his afternoons; and she was still so countrified as to dislike and dread walking alone, even in the quiet Belgravian regions, so that she was always relieved to decide that the gray mist was such as could do no one any good, or that she really was not well enough for a walk.

She did not know the use of change of scene, and the bracing effect of resolution, — she had no experience of self-management, and had not learnt that it was a duty not to let herself pine. Though most conscientious, she had not yet grown up to understand religion as a present comfort. To her it was a guide and an obligation, and as such she obeyed its dictates, to the best of her power, but only as an obedient child, without understanding the immediate reward in this life, namely, confidence, support, and peace. It is a feeling generally belonging to an age beyond hers, though only to be won by faithful discipline. She was walking in darkness, and, by and by, light might come. But there was one omission, for which she long after grieved; and which, though she knew it not, added to her present troubles.

All heart and hope had been taken from her since she had been forbidden to see her mother and sister. The present was dreary, the future nothing but gloom and apprehension, and she had little to distract her attention. She strove hard to fulfil what she knew were duties, her household concerns, and the readings she had fixed as tasks; but these over, she did not try to rouse her mind from her cares; nor had she perhaps the power, for her difficulties with the cook were too much for her; and it was very trying to spend so many hours of the dingy London day and long evening in solitude.

Her amusing books were exhausted, and she used to lie forlorn on the sofa, with her needlework, hearing the roar of carriage-wheels, and her mind roaming from the per-

plexities of her accounts to her sad forebodings and her belief in Arthur's coldness, till her heart seemed ready to break, — and her tears gathered, first in solitary drops, then in floods. She had no one to cheer her spirits, to share her hopes and fears. Her plans and employments were tedious to her husband, and he must not be troubled with them, — and so, locked up within herself, they oppressed her with care and apprehension. In letter-writing there was only pain; she could not bear to be supposed unwell or unhappy, and above all, dreaded saying what might lead to an offer from her mother to come to her. Her letters became mere comments on home news; she wrote less frequently, feared they would think her grown too fine to care for them, and then wept and sobbed with home sickness. There was a little more comfort in writing to Rickworth, for she expected the Brandons early in May, and her only hope was in Lady Elizabeth for care and counsel: for as to Arthur's dependence, his mother and sister, she felt as if the fear and restraint of their presence would be unbearable.

Her husband never guessed how she languished. In his presence she was a different creature, forgetting her griefs in the one wish of pleasing him. No matter what she had been undergoing in his absence, his knock raised her spirits, in a moment life darted into her limbs and colour into her cheeks. She had no notion of complaining — her mother had always been silent, though often with greater cause for remonstrance; and poor Violet, imagining herself a burthen, would not for the world have made herself more troublesome than she could help. Her whole desire was to win a smile, a fond word, a caress, and she sat watching as if those were life to her; her cheeks burning with eagerness so much that Arthur little guessed how wan they were in his absence.

The colour was heightened by warm rooms, for Arthur was of a chilly race, and could not understand how oppressive the close atmosphere of London was to one used to mountain breezes. He would come in shivering, and be

provoked to find her sitting by the smallest of fires; till she learnt that their estimate of heat was so different, that the only safety was in keeping the room like an oven. The folding doors into the back drawing-room had a trick of opening of their own accord, and the trouble given her by this draught trap, as Arthur called it, can hardly be estimated, especially one windy week in March, when he had a cold.

She had never been wont to think seriously of colds; but when it came to coughing and feverishness all night, and Arthur, with his hand on his chest, persisted that it was all in his throat, and told her to send for a blister, she grew alarmed, but this only displeased him; he disdained her entreaty that he would remain in bed; and said women always made a fuss about nothing, when she timidly suggested sending for "some one."

For three deplorable days he sat over the fire, with a distaste for everything, while she did her utmost to make him comfortable; and when she failed, thought it her own fault, reproached herself for her inefficiency, and imagined that he was going to be as ill as his brother, and that she should be of no use to him. How hard on him to have such a bad wife! She could not even entertain him while he was kept indoors — for she could not find anything to talk about, so long was it since she had been out, or read anything amusing.

However, on the third afternoon, he brightened up, found the soup good, talked and laughed, and declared that if to-morrow was fine, he should be out again. And the next day she was so delighted to find his cough was gone — more quickly than he had ever known so severe a cold depart — that it was not till he was out of the house that she remembered that she was condemned to solitude for many hours.

Here was quarter-day, bringing fresh confusion, in those inexplicable household expenses, and a miserable sense of wastefulness, and unfaithfulness to her charge. She thought

of John's advice, to make her husband attend, if she found her means insufficient; and set herself to draw up a statement of the case, to lay before him; but she grew more and more puzzled; the cook's dishonesty weighed on her, and her fears of taking any measures increased. Her calculations always ended in despairing tears.

She was lying on her bed, recovering from one of these almost hysterical fits, when she was roused from a doze by a knock at her door; and started up, trying to hide that anything had been the matter, as Sarah came in, and said, with a tone of authority,

"Mrs. Finch and Miss Gardner, Ma'am! but I will say you are not well enough to see them."

"O no, Sarah, I am quite well; I was only asleep."

"You had better not go down," sternly repeated Sarah. "You had much best lie down, and have your sleep out, after being kept awake till two o'clock last night, with Captain Martindale not coming home. And you with the pillow all awry, and that bit of a shawl over you! Lie you down, and I 'll set it straight."

But Violet was on her feet — the imputation on Captain Martindale had put her on her mettle. "Thank you, I don't want anything; I am going down directly."

Sarah shook her head, and looked significantly at the glass; and there, indeed, Violet perceived that her eyes bore traces of recent weeping; but, still, she would do anything rather than own her tears. "My head aches a little — that makes my eyes heavy," said she. "It will do me good to see Miss Gardner. I knew her at Martindale."

But when Violet found herself in the presence of Miss Gardner, and of a tall fashionable lady, she did not like the recollection that she had been talked of as a beauty.

She was glad to meet Miss Gardner, but Mrs. Finch's style was dashing and almost boisterous, and her voice quick and loud, as she seized on her hand, exclaiming, "I want no introduction, I have heard so much of you! I know we shall be excellent friends. I must hear of

Theodora. You know she is the greatest ally I have on earth. When did you hear of her last? When are they coming to town? I would not miss Theodora's first appearance for all the world."

Violet felt overpowered by the torrent; but thought it was giving no right impression of her husband to look disconsolate, and exerted herself to be cheerful, and answer.

But they would speak of Martindale, and oblige her to expose her ignorance. She did not know when the family were coming to town, nor had she heard when Mr. Martindale's return might be expected.

If Miss Gardner had been alone, she thought she might have got on better; but the quieter elder sister hardly put in a word, so unceasing was the talk of the younger; whose patronage became oppressive, when she began on Mrs. Martindale herself; told her she was lazy, taking too much care, and growing nervous: and even declared she should come some day, take her by storm, and carry her out for a drive in the park.

Poor Violet felt as if to be shut up in the carriage with this talking lady would kill her outright; begged she would not take the trouble; but only met with smiles, and declarations that Theodora would scold her well when she came.

The next afternoon Violet listened with dread to the sounds of wheels, and was not at all inclined to blame a head-ache, which was sufficient excuse for sending down thanks and refusal. On the following, she had just made up her mind that the danger was over for that day, when her alarm was excited by a thundering knock, and in walked her brother.

"Well, Violet, I have caught you at home. I 'm come to town about Lord St. Erme's business — go back by the mail train. Are you dining at home? Can you give me a dinner?"

"Oh, yes!" said Violet; but fears came over her of Arthur's not being pleased, especially supposing he should bring back any one with him. And therewith came dismay at

finding herself giving no better welcome to her own brother, and she eagerly asked for all at home.

"In a high state of preservation. And how are you? You don't look quite the thing."

"Oh, yes, I am, thank you."

"And how is Martindale?"

He would not call him so to his face! thought the wife. Oh! I wish he would sit anywhere but in Arthur's chair, and not fidget me with playing with that horrid little piece of watch chain! "He is very well, thank you. He had a bad cold last week, but it is quite gone now. I hope he will soon come in."

"I am not sorry to have found you alone. I want to hear something of these relations of yours."

Oh! I shall be sure to say something wrong! thought she, and as the best thing to put forward, announced that they would soon be in London.

"And they are not high with you? I hear fine accounts of their grandeur, — they say the lady and her daughter are eaten up with pride, and think no one fit to speak to."

"Miss Martindale has the plainest ways in the world. She will do anything for the poor people."

"Ay, ay; that 's the way with fine ladies, — they like to be condescending and affable. And so you say they receive you well? make you one of the family — eh?"

Violet hoped it was not wrong to utter a faint "yes."

"Does Martindale's sister write to you?"

"No; she does not write letters much. But I told you how very kind they are — Mr. Martindale, his brother, especially."

"Ay!" said Albert, "he disconcerted our calculations. He seems to have taken out a new lease."

"He is a great deal better."

"But he has no lungs left. His life can't be worth a year's purchase, by what the governor heard. He would never have let Martindale have you on such easy terms if he had not looked on you as good as her ladyship."

Such shame and disgust came over Violet that she felt unworthy to sit on John Martindale's chair, and moved to the sofa, trying to change the subject; but Albert persisted in inquiries about Mr. Martindale's age, health, and the likelihood of his marrying, till she could no longer be without the perception that not only had her husband been to blame for their marriage — her father's part had been far worse.

Albert hoped the old lord was coming down handsomely, and tried to make her tell their income. She was glad not to know, and he began calculating it from their style of living, with such disregard to her feelings, as made her contrast his manners with those of the true gentlemen to whom she was now accustomed, and feel sadly that there was reason in her husband's wish to keep her family at a distance. There was no checking or silencing this elder brother; she could only feel humiliated by each proof of his vulgarity of mind, and blame herself, by turns, for churlishness to him, and for permitting conversation Arthur would so much dislike.

Why would not Arthur come and put a stop to it? It was not the first time she had waited dinner for him in vain, and though she tried to make Albert think she liked it, she knew she was a very bad dissembler.

When she at length ordered in dinner, the conversation changed to Wrangerton doings, the Christmas gaieties, jokes about her sisters and their imputed admirers, and a Miss Louisa Davies — a new comer, about whom Albert seemed to wish to be laughed at himself. But poor Violet had no spirits even to perceive this, — she only thought of home and the familiar scenes recalled by each name. What a gulf between her and them! In what free, careless happiness they lived! What had her father done in thrusting her into a position for which she was unfit, — into a family who did not want her, and upon one to whom she was only a burthen? At home they thought her happy and fortunate! They should never guess at her wretchedness.

But when the time for Albert's departure came, Violet

forgot his inconvenient questions, and would have given the world to keep him. He was her own brother — a part of home; he loved her — she had felt inhospitable to him, and perhaps she should never see him again.

When he recurred to her pale looks and languid manner, and expressed concern, it was all she could do to keep from bursting into tears, and telling all her griefs; and she could not control the rapid agitated tones that belied her repeated assurances that nothing was amiss, and that he must not give a bad account of her and alarm her mother.

She could hardly let him go; and when he bade her good-bye, there was a moment's intense desire to be going with him, from this lonely room, home to her mother and Annette, instantly followed by a horror at such a wish having occurred, and then came the sobs and tears. She dreaded that Arthur might be displeased at the visit; but he came home full of good humour, and on hearing of it, only hoped she had good news from Wrangerton, and said he was glad he had been out of the way, so that she had been able to have her brother all to herself.

Her fears of the effect of Albert's account of her were better founded; for two mornings after, on coming down to breakfast, she found a letter from her mother to exhort her to be careful, assuring her that she need have no scruple in sending for her, and betraying so much uneasiness as to add to all her terrors. She saw this in one glance; for she knew that to dwell on the tender affectionate letter would bring on a fit of weeping, and left it and the dreadful consideration of her reply till Arthur should be gone, as he was to spend the day in fishing with a friend in the country.

He had come home late last night, and was not yet dressed, and she waited long, gazing at the gleams of sunshine on the square gardens, thinking how bright this second day of April must be anywhere but here, where it was close and oppressive, and wondering whether Helvellyn was beginning to lose his snow; then, as Helvellyn brought the sensation that led to tears, she took the newspaper, and had

read more than she cared for before Arthur appeared, in the state of impatience which voluntary lateness is sure to produce.

She gave him his tea as quickly as she could, but all went wrong: it was a horrid cold day, *all* east wind — there was a cold wind coming in somewhere.

"The back drawing-room window! I'm sorry I did not see it was open."

"What makes you go to shut it?" said he, hastily marching across the room, and closing it and the doors. "I shall be gone in a moment, and you may let in a hurricane if you like. Have you seen my cigar-case?"

"It was on the ledge of your wardrobe."

"Some of your maids have been and hid it."

"I told Sarah never to put your things away. I think I could find it."

"No, don't go; I have looked everywhere."

As he never found things, even when before his eyes, this was not conclusive; and she undertook the search in spite of another careless "No, no, don't," knowing it meant the contrary.

She could not find it in his dressing-room, and he looked annoyed, again accusing the maids. This made her feel injured, and though growing exhausted, as well she might, as she had not even begun breakfast, she said she would look in the sitting-room. He half remonstrated, without looking up from the paper; but she hoped to be gladdened by thanks, hunted in all his hiding-places in vain, and found she must give it up, after a consultation with Sarah, who resentfully denied all knowledge of it, and told her she looked ready to drop.

Dolefully coming into the hall, she saw Arthur's black travelling-bag. Was it for more than the day? The evenings were bad enough — but a desolate night! And he had never told her!

"I suppose you have not found it?"

"No; I wish I could!"

"Never mind; it will turn up. You have tired yourself."

"But, Arthur, are you not coming home to-night?"

"Didn't I tell you? If I can't get away by the seven o'clock train, I thought of sleeping there. Ten o'clock, I declare! I shall miss the train!"

She came to the head of the stairs with him, asking plaintively, "When *do* you come home? To-morrow, at latest?"

Perhaps it was her querulous tone, perhaps a mere boyish dislike to being tied down, or even it might be mere hurry, that made him answer impatiently, "I can't tell — as it may happen. D'ye think I want to run away! Only take care of yourself."

This was in his coaxing voice; but it was not a moment when she could bear to be turned aside, like an importunate child, and she was going to speak; but he saw the wrong fishing-rod carried out, called hastily to James, ran down stairs, and was gone, without even looking back at her.

The sound of the closing door conveyed a sense of utter desolation to her overwrought mind — the house was a solitary prison; she sank on the sofa, sobbing, "Oh, I am very, very miserable! Why did he take me from home, if he could not love me? Oh, what will become of me? Oh, Mamma! Mamma!"

CHAPTER II.

What is so shrill as silent tears?
GEORGE HERBERT.

ARTHUR came home late in the afternoon of the following day. The door was opened to him by his brother, who abruptly said, "She is dying. You must lose not a moment if you would see her alive."

Arthur turned pale, and gave an inarticulate exclamation of horror-stricken inquiry — "Confined?"

"Half-an-hour ago. She was taken ill yesterday morning immediately after you left her. She is insensible, but you may find her still living."

Nothing but strong indignation could have made John Martindale thus communicate such tidings. He had arrived that day at noon to find that the creature he had left in the height of her bright loveliness was in the extremity of suffering and peril — her husband gone no one knew whither; and the servants, too angry not to speak plainly, reporting that he had left her in hysterics. John tried not to believe the half, but as time went on, bringing despair of the poor young mother's life, and no tidings of Arthur; while he became more and more certain that there had been cruel neglect, the very gentleness and compassion of his nature fired and glowed against him who had taken her from her home, vowed to cherish her, and forsaken her at such a time. However, he was softened by seeing him stagger against the wall, perfectly stunned, then gathering breath, rush upstairs without a word.

As Arthur pushed open the door, there was a whisper that it was he, too late, and room was made for him. All he knew was, that those around watched as if it was not yet death, but what else did he see on those ashy senseless features?

With a cry of despair he threw himself almost over her, and implored her but once to speak, or look at him. No one thought her capable even of hearing, but at his voice the eyelids and lips slightly moved, and a look of relief came over the face.

A hand pressed his shoulder, and a spoon containing a drop of liquid was placed in his fingers, while some one said, "Try to get her to take this."

Scarcely conscious, he obeyed, and calling her by every endearing name, beyond hope succeeded in putting it between her lips. Her eyes opened and were turned on him, her hand closed on his, and her features assumed a look of peace. The spark of life was for a moment detained by the power of affection, but in a short space the breath must cease, the clasp of the hand relax.

Once more he was interrupted by a touch, and this time

it was Sarah's whisper — "The minister is come, Sir. What name shall it be?"

"Anything — John," said he, without turning his head or taking in what she said.

The clergyman and John Martindale were waiting in the dressing-room, with poor Violet's cathedral cup filled with water.

"She does not know him?" asked John, anxiously, as Sarah entered.

"Yes, Sir, she does," said Sarah, contorting her face to keep back the tears. "She looked at him, and has hold of his hand. I think she will die easier for it, poor dear."

"And at least the poor child is alive to be baptized?"

"O, yes, Sir, it seems a bit livelier now," said Sarah, opening a fold of the flannel in her arms. "It is just like its poor mamma."

"Is it a girl?" he inquired, by no means perceiving the resemblance.

"A boy, Sir. His papa never asked, though he did say his name should be John."

"It matters little," said John, mournfully, for to his eye there was nothing like life in that tiny form. "And yet how marvellous," thought he, "to think of its infinite gain by these few moments of unconscious existence!"

At the touch of the water it gave a little cry, which Sarah heard with a start and glance of infinite satisfaction.

She returned to the chamber, where the same deathly stillness prevailed; the husband, the medical men, the nurse, all in their several positions, as if they had neither moved nor looked from the insensible, scarcely breathing figure.

The infant again gave a feeble sound, and once more the white features moved, the eyes opened, and a voice said, so faintly, that Arthur, as he hung over her, alone could hear it, "My baby! O, let me see it!"

"Bring the child," and at the sound of those words the gleam of life spread over her face more completely.

He could not move from her side, and Sarah placed the little creature upon his broad hand. He held it close to her. "Our baby!" again she murmured, and tried to kiss it, but it made another slight noise, and this overcame her completely, the deathly look returned, and he hastily gave back the infant.

She strove hard for utterance, and he could hardly catch her gasping words, "You 'll be fond of it, and think of me."

"Don't, don't talk so, dearest. You will soon be better. You are better. Let me give you this."

"Please, I had rather lie still. Do let me." Then again looking up, as if she had been losing the consciousness of his presence, "Oh! it is you. Are you come? Kiss me and wish me good-bye."

"You are better — only take this. Won't you? You need not move; Violet, Violet, only try. To please me! There, well done, my precious one. Now you will be more comfortable."

"Thank you, oh no! But I am glad you are come. I did wish to be a good wife. I had so much to say to you — if I could — but I can't remember. And my baby; but oh! this is dying," as the sinking returned. "O, Arthur, keep me, don't let me die!" and she clung to him in terror.

He flung his arm closer round her, looking for help to the doctors. "You shall not, you will not, my own, my darling."

"You can't help it," sighed she. "And I don't know how — if some one would say a prayer?"

He could only repeat protests that she must live, but she grew more earnest. "A prayer! I can't recollect — Oh! is it wicked? Will God have mercy? Oh! would you but say a prayer?"

"Yes, yes, but what? Give me a book."

Sarah put one into his hand, and pointed to a place, but his eyes were misty, his voice faltered, broke down, and he was obliged to press his face down on the pillows to stifle his sobs.

Violet was roused to such a degree of bewildered distress and alarm at the sight of his grief, that the doctors insisted on removing him, and almost forced him away.

There had been prayers offered for her, of which she knew nothing.

The clergyman was gone, and John had despatched his melancholy letter to Lord Martindale, when he heard the steps on the stairs. Was it over? No, it was only one of the doctors with Arthur, and they did not come to him, but talked in the back drawing-room for some moments, after which the doctor took leave, repeating the words in John's hearing, that Arthur must compose himself before returning to her — agitation would be at once fatal. Arthur had thrown himself on the sofa, with his face hidden in his hands, in such overpowering distress, that his brother's displeasure could not continue for a moment, and he began to speak soothingly of the present improvement.

"It cannot last," said Arthur. "They say it is but a question of minutes or hours," and again he gave way to a burst of grief, but presently it changed to an angry tone. "Why was I never sent for?"

John explained that no one knew whither to send. He could hardly credit this, and his wrath increased at the stupidity of the servants; it seemed to relieve him to declaim against them.

"Then you left her well?"

"Of course I did. She had been searching over the house for that abominable cigar-case of mine, which was in my pocket all the time! I shall never bear to see it again," and he launched it into the fire with vehemence. "I suppose that upset her! Why did I not prevent her? Fool that I was not to know it was not fit for her, though she chose to do it. But I never took care of her."

"She is so very unselfish," said John.

"That was it. I thought women always looked out for themselves. I should have known I had one not like the rest! She had never one thought for herself, and it is

killing her, the sweetest, loveliest, best — my precious Violet? John, John! is there nothing that can be done for her?" cried he, starting up in a tumultuous agony of grief, and striking his foot on the floor.

"Could we not send for her mother? Brown might set off at once to fetch her."

"Thank you; but no, it is of no use. No railroad within forty miles of the place. She could not be here till — till — and then I could not see her." He was pacing the room, and entangled his foot in Violet's little work-table, and it fell. Her work-box flew open, and as they stooped to pick up the articles, Arthur again wept without control as he took up a little frock, half made, with the needle hanging to it. The table-drawer had fallen out, and with it the large account-book, the weekly bills, and a sheet of paper covered with figures, and blotted and blistered with tears. The sight seemed to overwhelm him more than all. "Crying over these! My Violet crying! Oh! what have I been doing?"

"And why? What distressed her?"

"It was too much for her. She would plague herself with these wretched household accounts! She knew I hated the sound of them. I never let her bring them to me; but little did I think that she cried over them alone!"

"She was cheerful with you?"

"Was not she? I never saw that dear face without its sweet smile, come when I would. I have never heard a complaint. I have left her to herself, madman as I was, when she was unwell and anxious! But — oh! if she could only recover, she should see — Ha! Sarah, can I come?"

"Yes, Sir, she is asking for you; but, if you please, Sir, Mr. Harding says you must come very quiet. She seems wandering, and thinking you are not come home, Sir," said Sarah, with a grisly satisfaction in dealing her blow home.

John tried to rectify the confusion in the work-box with a sort of reverential care; not able to bear to leave it in disorder, whether its mistress were ever to open it again or not,

yet feeling it an intrusion to meddle with her little feminine hoards of precious trifles.

"Poor Arthur!" said he to himself, "he may fairly be acquitted of all but his usual inconsiderateness towards one too tender for such treatment. He deserves more pity than blame. And for her — thank Heaven for the blessing on them that mourn. Innocent creature, much will be spared her; if I could but dwell on that rather than on the phantom of delight she was, and my anticipations of again seeing the look that recalls Helen. If Helen was here, how she would be nursing her!"

John saw his brother no more that evening — only heard of Violet "as barely kept alive, as it seemed, by his care." Each report was such that the next must surely be the last; and John sat waiting on till his servant insisted on his going to bed, promising to call him if his brother needed him.

The night passed without the summons, and in the morning there was still life. John had been down-stairs for some little time, when he heard the medical man, who had spent the night there, speaking to Arthur on the stairs. "A shade of improvement" was the report. "Asleep now; and if we can only drag her through the next few days there may be hope, as long as fever does not supervene."

"Thank Heaven!" said John, fervently. "I did not venture to hope for this."

But Arthur was utterly downcast, and could not take heart. It was his first real trouble, and there was little of the substance of endurance in his composition. That one night of watching, grief, and self-reproach, had made his countenance so pale and haggard, and his voice so dejected and subdued, that John was positively startled, as he heard his answer —

"I never saw any one so ill."

"Come and have some breakfast, you look quite worn out."

"I cannot stay," said he, sitting down, however. "She

must not miss me, or all chance would be over. You don't mind the door being open?"

"No, indeed. Is she sensible now?"

"Clear for a minute, if she has my hand; but then she dozes off, and talks about those miserable accounts — the numbers over and over again. It cuts me to the heart to hear her. They talk of an over-strain on the mind! Heigh-ho! Next she wakes with a dreadful frightened start, and stares about wildly, fancying I am gone."

"But she knows you," said John, trying to speak consolingly.

"Yes, no one else can do anything with her. She does not so much as hear them. I must be back before she wakes; but I am parched with thirst. How is this? Where is the tea?"

"I suppose you put in none. Is this the chest?"

Arthur let his head drop on his hand, helpless and overcome, as this little matter brought home the sense of missing his wife, and the remembrance of the attentions he had allowed her to lavish upon him. His brother tried the tea-chest, and, finding it locked, poured out some coffee, which he drank almost unconsciously, then gave his cup for more, sighed, pushed his hair back, and looked up somewhat revived. John tended him affectionately, persuading him to take food; and when he had passively allowed his plate to be filled, his appetite discovered that he had tasted nothing since yesterday morning, and therewith his spirits were refreshed; he looked up cheerfully, and there was less despondency in his tone as he spoke of her sleep towards morning having been less disturbed.

"The child woke her with a squall, and I thought we were undone; but no such thing. I declare nothing has done her so much good; she had him brought, and was so happy over him, then went off to sleep again."

"This is a great relief," said John. "From your manner, I dreaded to ask for him, but I hope he may be doing well."

"I am sure I hope so, or it would be all over with her. I

believe both their lives hang on one thread.' To see her with him this morning — I did not know such fondness was in women. I declare I never saw anything like it; and she so weak! And such a creature as it is; the smallest thing that ever was born, they say, and looking — like nothing on earth but young mice."

John could not help smiling: "That is better than yesterday, when I could scarcely believe he was alive."

"What! did you see him?"

"When he was baptized."

"Was he? What did you call him?"

"You sent word to name him John."

"Did I? I had not the least recollection of it. I forgot all about him till he made himself heard this morning, and she wanted to know whether he was boy or girl."

"A son and heir," said John, glad to see the young father able to look gratified.

"Well, it is the best name; I hope she will like it. But, hollo, John, where did you drop from?" as it suddenly occurred to him to be surprised.

"I came home on some business of Fotheringham's. I landed early yesterday, and came up from Southampton."

"A fine state of things to come to," sighed Arthur. "But you will not go away?"

"Certainly not till she is better."

"Ah! you were always fond of her; you appreciated her from the first. There is no one whom I should have liked so well to have here." Then, with a pause, he added, in a tone of deep feeling: "John, you might well give me that warning about making her happy; but, indeed, I meant to do so;" and his eyes filled with tears.

"As far as affection could go, you have done so," said John, "or you could not have recalled her to life now."

"You little know," said Arthur, sadly; "Heaven knows it was not want of affection; but I never guessed what she underwent. Sarah tells me she spent hours in tears, though she would never allow them to be noticed."

"Poor Violet! But what could be her trouble?"

"Her household affairs seem to have overpowered her, and I never would attend to them; little thinking how she let them prey upon her. I never thought of her being lonely; and her sweet, bright face, and uncomplaining ways, never reminded me. There never was any one like her; she was too good for me, too good to live, that is the truth; and now I must lose her!"

"Do not think so, Arthur; do not give way. The getting through this night is more than could have been hoped. Happiness is often the best cure; and if she is able to take so much pleasure in you, and in the child, it is surely a hopeful sign."

"So they said; that her noticing the child made them think better of her. If she can but get over it, she shall see. But you will stay with me, John," said he, as if he clung to the support.

"That I will, thank you. I could not bear to go. I can sleep in Belgrave Square, if you want my room for her mother."

"We shall see how it is by post-time. I tried whether it would rouse her to tell her I would write to Mrs. Moss, but she took no heed, and the old nurse looked daggers at me."

He was interrupted; Violet had awakened in an alarming fit of trembling, imploring to be told why he was angry, and whether he would ever come back.

So glimmered the feeble ray of life throughout the day; and when the post went out, the end was apparently so near, that it was thought in vain to send for Mrs. Moss; whom Arthur shrank from seeing, when it should be too late. He was so completely overwhelmed with distress, that in the short intervals he spent out of the sick-room, it was his brother's whole work to cheer and sustain him sufficiently to perform those offices, which Violet was incapable of receiving from any one else.

It was no wonder he broke down; for it was a piteous sight to see that fair young mother, still a child in years,

and in her exhausted state of wavering consciousness, alive only through her fond affections; gleams of perception, and momentary flashes of life, called forth only by her husband, or by the moanings of the little frail babe, which seemed to have as feeble and precarious a hold of life as herself. The doctors told John that they were haunted through the day by the remembrance of her face, so sweet, even in insensibility, and so very lovely, when the sound of her babe's voice, for a moment, lighted up the features. Their anxiety for her was intense; and if this was the case with strangers, what must it not have been for her husband, to whom every delirious murmur was an unconscious reproach, and who had no root of strength within himself? The acuteness of his grief, and his effectiveness as a nurse, were such as to surprise his brother, who only now perceived how much warmth of heart had been formerly stifled in a cold, ungenial home.

Sustained from hour to hour by his unremitting care, she did, however, struggle through the next three days; and at last came a sounder sleep, and a wakening so tranquil, that Arthur did not perceive it, till he saw, in the dim lamplight, those dark eyes calmly fixed upon him. The cry of the infant was heard, and she begged for it, fondling it, and murmuring over it with a soft inarticulate sound of happiness.

"You purr like an old cat over her kitten," said Arthur, longing to see her smile once more; and he was not disappointed; it was a bright, contented, even joyous smile, that played on the colourless features, and the eyes beamed softly on him as she said, "Kiss him, Papa."

He would have done anything for her at that moment, and another bright look rewarded him.

"Does mamma know about this dear little baby?" she said, presently.

"Yes, dearest, I have written every day. She sends you her love;" and as Violet murmured something of "Dear mamma—"

"Do you wish to have her here?"

"No, indeed, I don't wish it now," said Violet; "you do make me so very happy."

She was returning to her full self, with all her submission to his will, and in fact she did not wish for any change; her content in his attention was so complete, so peaceful, that in her state of weakness there was an instinctive dread of breaking the charm. To lie still, her babe beside her, and Arthur watching her, was the perfect repose of felicity, and imperceptibly her faculties were, one by one, awakening. Her thoughtfulness for others had revived; Arthur had been giving her some nourishment, and, for the first time, she had taken it with relish, when it so chanced that the light fell for a moment on his face, and she was startled by perceiving the effects of anxiety and want of sleep. In vain he assured her there was nothing the matter. She accused herself of having been exacting and selfish, and would not be comforted till he had promised to take a good night's rest. He left her, at length, nearly asleep, to carry the tidings to his brother, and enjoy his look of heartfelt rejoicing. Never had the two very dissimilar brothers felt so much drawn together; and as John began, as usual, to wait on him, and to pour out his coffee, he said, as he sat down wearied, "Thank you, John, I can't think what would have become of me without you!"

"My father would have come to you if I had not been here."

"Where's his letter — I forgot all about it. Is there none from Theodora?"

"No; I suppose she waited for further accounts."

Arthur began reading his father's letter; "Very kind! a very kind letter indeed!" said he, warmly. "Earned so high a place in our regard — her sweetness and engaging qualities," — I must keep that to show her. This is very kind too about what it must be to me. I did not think he had appreciated her so well!"

"Yes, indeed, he did," said John. "This is what he

says to me. 'Never have I seen one more gentle and engaging, and I feel sure she would have gained more on our affections every day, and proved herself a treasure to the family.'"

"That is right," said Arthur. "He will get to know her well when they come to London! I'll write to him to-morrow, and thank him, and say, no need for him to come now! 'Hopes his grandson will live to be a comfort to me!'" and Arthur could not help laughing.

"Well, I am not come to that yet!"

"He is much pleased at its being a son," said John.

"Poor little mortal!" said Arthur, "if he means to be a comfort I wish he would stop that dismal little wail — have one good squall and have done with it. He will worry his mother and ruin all now she takes more notice. So here's Mrs. Moss's letter. I could not open it this morning, and I have been inventing messages to Violet from her — poor woman! I have some good news for her now. It is all about coming, but Violet says she does not want her. I can't read it all, my eyes are so weak! Violet said they were bloodshot," and he began to examine them in the glass.

"Yes, you are not equal to much more nursing; you are quite done for."

"I am!" said Arthur, stretching. "I'm off to bed, as she begged me; but the worst is over now! We shall do very well when Theodora comes; and if she has a taste for the boy, she and Violet will make friends over him, — good night."

With a long yawn, Arthur very stiffly walked up stairs, where Sarah stood at the top waiting for him. "Mrs. Martindale is asleep, Sir; you had best not go in," said she. "I have made up a bed in your dressing-room, and you 'd best not be lying down in your clothes, but take a good sleep right out, or you 'll be fit for nothing next. I'll see and call if she wants you."

"Thank you, Sarah; I wonder how long you have been up; you will be fit for nothing next."

"It don't hurt *me*," said Sarah, in disdain; and as Arthur shut his door, she murmured to herself, "I 'm not that sort to be knocked up with nothing; but he is an easy kind-spoken gentleman after all. I 'll never forget what he has done for missus. There is not so much harm in him neither; he is nothing but a great big boy as ought to be ashamed of hisself."

The night passed off well; Violet, with a great exertion of self-command, actually composed herself on awaking in one of her nervous fits of terror; prevented his being called; and fairly deserved all the fond praise he lavished on her in the morning for having been so good a child.

"You must not call me child now," said she, with a happy little pride. "I must be wiser now."

"Shall I call you the prettiest and youngest mamma in England?"

"Ah! I am too young and foolish. I wish I was quite seventeen!"

"Have you been awake long?"

"Yes; but so comfortable. I have been thinking about baby's name."

"Too late, Violet; they named him John: they say I desired it."

"What! was he obliged to be baptized? Is he so delicate? Oh, Arthur! tell me; I know he is tiny, but I did not think he was ill."

Arthur tried to soothe her with assurances of his well-doing, and the nurse corroborated them; but though she tried to believe, she was not pacified, and would not let her treasure be taken from within her arms till Mr. Harding arrived — his morning visit having been hastened by a despatch from Arthur, who feared that she would suffer for her anxiety. She asked so many questions that he, who last night had seen her too weak to look up or speak, was quite taken by surprise. By a little exceeding the truth, he did at length satisfy her mind; but after this there was an alteration in her manner with her baby; it was not only the

mere caressing, there was a sort of reverence, and look of reflection as she contemplated him, such as made Arthur once ask, what she could be studying in that queer little red visage?

"I was thinking how very good he is!" was her simple answer; and Arthur's smile by no means comprehended her meaning.

Her anxious mind retarded her recovery, and Arthur's unguarded voice on the stairs having revealed to her that a guest was in the house, led to inquiries, and an endless train of fears, lest Mr. Martindale should be uncomfortable and uncared for. Her elasticity of mind had been injured by her long course of care, and she could not shake off the household anxieties that revived as she became able to think.

Indeed there were things passing that would have greatly astonished her. Sarah had taken the management of everything, including her master; and with iron composure and rigidity of demeanour, delighted in teasing him by giving him a taste of some of the cares he had left her mistress to endure. First came an outcry for keys. They were supposed to be in a box, and when that was found, its key was missing. Again Arthur turned out the unfortunate drawer, and only spared the workbox on John's testifying that it was not there, and suggesting Violet's watch-chain, where he missed it, and Sarah found it; and then, with imperturbable precision, in spite of his attempts to escape, stood over him, and made him unlock and give out everything himself. "If things was wrong," she said, "it was her business that he should see it was not owing to her."

Arthur was generally indifferent to what he ate or drank, — the reaction, perhaps, of the luxury of his home; but having had a present of some peculiar trout from Captain Fitzhugh, and being, as an angler, a connoisseur in fish, many were his exclamations at detecting that those which were served up at breakfast were not the individuals sent.

Presently, in the silence of the house, John heard tones

gradually rising on the stairs, till Arthur's voice waxed loud and wrathful. "You might as well say they were red herrings!"

Something shrill ensued, cut short by, "Mrs. Martindale does as she pleases. Send up Captain Fitzhugh's trout."

A loud reply, in a higher key.

"Don't tell me of the families where you have lived—the trout!"

Here John's hand was laid upon his arm, with a sign towards his wife's room; whereupon he ran down stairs, driving the cook before him.

Soon he came hastily up, storming about the woman's impertinence, and congratulating himself on having paid her wages and got rid of her.

John asked what was to be done next? and was diverted with his crest-fallen looks, when asked what was to become of Violet.

However, when Sarah was consulted, she gravely replied, "She thought as how she could contrive till Mrs. Martindale was about again;" and the corners of her mouth relaxed into a ghastly smile, as she replied, "Yes, Sir," in answer to her master's adjurations to keep the dismissal a secret from Mrs. Martindale.

"Ay!" said John, "I wish you joy of having to tell her what revolutions you have made."

"I 'll take care of that, if the women will only hold their tongues."

They were as guarded as he could wish, seeing as plainly as he did, how fretting over her household matters prolonged her state of weakness. It was a tedious recovery, and she was not able even to receive a visit from John till the morning, when the cough, always brought on by London air, obliged him reluctantly to depart.

He found her on the sofa, wrapped in shawls, her hair smoothed back under a cap; her shady, dark eyes still softer from languor, and the exquisite outline of her fair, pallid features, looking as if it was cut out in ivory against the

white pillows. She welcomed him with a pleased smile; but he started back, and flushed as if from pain, and his hand trembled as he pressed hers, then turned away and coughed.

"Oh, I am sorry your cough is so bad," said she.

"Nothing to signify," he replied, recovering. "Thank you for letting me come to see you. I hope you are not tired?"

"Oh, no, thank you. Arthur carried me so nicely, and baby is so good this morning."

"Where is he? I was going to ask for him."

"In the next room. I want to show him to you, but he is asleep."

"A happy circumstance," said Arthur, who was leaning over the back of her sofa. "No one else can get in a word when that gentleman is awake."

"Now, Arthur, I wanted his uncle to see him, and say if he is not grown."

"Never mind, Violet," said Arthur. "Nurse vouches for it, that the child, who was put through his mother's wedding-ring, grew up to be six feet high!"

"Now, Arthur! you know it was only her bracelet."

"Well, then, our boy ought to be twelve feet high; for if you had not stuffed him out with long clothes, you might put two of him through your bracelet."

"If nurse would but have measured him; but she said it was unlucky."

"She would have no limits to her myths; however, he may make a show in the world by the time John comes to the christening."

"Ah!" said Violet, with a sweet, timid expression, and a shade of red just tinting her cheek as she turned to John. "Arthur said I should ask you to be his god-father."

"My first god-child!" said John. "Thank you, indeed; you could hardly have given me a greater pleasure."

"Thank you," again said Violet. "I like so much for you to have him, — you who," she hesitated, unable to say the

right words, "who *did it* before his papa or I saw the little fellow;" then pausing — "Oh, Mr. Martindale, Sarah told me all about it, and I have been longing to thank you, only I can't;" and her eyes filling with tears, she put her hand into his, glancing at the cathedral cup, which was placed on the mantel-shelf. "It was so kind of you to take that."

"I thought you would like it," said John; "and it was the most ecclesiastical thing I could find."

"I little thought it would be my Johnnie's font," said Violet, softly.

"I shall always feel that I have a share in him beyond my fellow-sponsors."

"O, yes, he belongs to you," said Violet; "besides his other godfather will only be Colonel Harrington, and his godmother — you have written to ask your sister, have you not, Arthur?"

"I 'd as soon ask Aunt Nesbit," exclaimed Arthur. "I do believe one cares as much as the other."

"You must send for me when you are well enough to take him to church," said John.

"That I will. I wish you could stay for it. He will be a month old to-morrow-week, but it may wait, I hope, till I can go with him. I must soon get down stairs again!"

"Ah! you will find the draught trap mended," said Arthur. "Brown set to work on it, and the doors shut as tight as a new boot."

"I am often amused to see Brown scent out and pursue a draught," said John.

"I have been avoiding Brown ever since Friday," said Arthur; "when he met me with a serious 'Captain Martindale, Sir,' and threatened me with your being laid up for the year if I kept you here. I told him it was his fault for letting you come home so early, and condoled with him on your insubordination."

"Ah! Violet does not know what order Sarah keeps you in?" retorted John.

"I am afraid you have both been very uncomfortable!"

"No, not in the least; Sarah is a paragon, I assure you."

"She has been very kind to me, but so has every one. No one was ever so well nursed! You must know what a perfect nurse Arthur is!"

Arthur laughed. "John! Why he would as soon be nursed by a monkey as by me. There he lies on a perfect bank of pillows, coughs whenever you speak to him, and only wants to get rid of every one but Brown. Nothing but consideration for Brown induces him to allow my father or Percy Fotheringham now and then to sit up."

"A comfortable misanthropical picture," said John, "but rather too true. You see, Violet, what talents you have brought out."

Violet was stroking her husband's hand, and looking very proud and happy. "Only I was so selfish! Does not he look very pale still?"

"That is not your fault so much as that of some one else," said John. "Some one who declares smoking cigars in his den down stairs refreshes him more than a sensible walk."

"Of course," said Arthur, "it is only ladies, and men, who have nursed themselves as long as you have, who ever go out for a constitutional."

"He will be on duty to-morrow," said Violet, "and so he will be obliged to go out."

"And you will write to me, Violet?" said John, "when you are ready. I wish I could expect to hear how you get on, but it is vain to hope for letters from Arthur."

"I know," said Violet; "but only think how good he has been to write to mamma for me. I was so proud when he brought me the letter to sign."

"Have you any message for me to take?" said John, rising.

"No, thank you — only to thank Lord and Lady Martindale for their kind messages. And oh" — but checking herself — "No, you won't see them."

"Whom?"

"Lady Elizabeth and Emma. I had such a kind letter from them. So anxious about me, and begging me to let some one write; and I am afraid they 'll think it neglectful; but I turn giddy if I sit up, and when I can write, the first letter must be for mamma. So if there is any communication with Rickworth, could you let them know that I am getting better, and thank them very much?"

"Certainly. I will not fail to let them know. Good bye, Violet, I am glad to have seen you."

"Good bye. I hope your cough will be better," said Violet.

He retained her hand a moment, looked at her fixedly, the sorrowful expression returned, and he hastened away in silence.

Arthur followed, and presently coming back said, "Poor John! You put him so much in mind of Helen."

"Poor Mr. Martindale!" exclaimed Violet. "Am I like her?"

"Not a bit," said Arthur. "Helen had light hair and eyes, a fat sort of face, and no pretence to be pretty — a downright sort of person, not what you would fancy John's taste. If any one else had compared you it would have been no compliment; but he told me you had reminded him of her from the first, and now your white cheeks and sick dress recalled her illness so much, that he could hardly bear it. But don't go and cry about it."

"No, I won't," said Violet, submissively; "but I am afraid it did not suit him for us to be talking nonsense. It is so very sad."

"Poor John! so it is," said Arthur, looking at her, as if beginning to realize what his brother had lost. "However, she was not his wife, though, after all, they were almost as much attached. He has not got over it in the least. This is the first time I have known him speak of it, and he could not get out her name."

"It is nearly two years ago."

"Nearly. She died in June. It was that cold late summer,

and her funeral was in the middle of a hail storm, horridly chilly."

"Where was she buried?"

"At Brogden. Old Mr. Fotheringham was buried there, and she was brought there. I came home for it. What a day it was — the hailstones standing on the grass, and I shall never forget poor John's look — all shivering and shrunk up together." He shivered at the bare remembrance. "It put the finishing touch to the damage he had got by staying in England with her all the winter. By night he was frightfully ill — inflammation worse than ever. Poor John! That old curmudgeon of a grandfather has much to answer for, though you ought to be grateful to him, Violet; for I suppose it will end in that boy of yours being his lordship some time or other."

The next morning was a brisk one with Violet. She wished Arthur not to be anxious about leaving her, and having by no means ceased to think it a treat to see him in uniform, she gloried in being carried to her sofa by so grand and soldierly a figure, and uttered her choicest sentence of satisfaction — "It is like a story!" while his epaulette was scratching her cheek.

"I don't know how to trust you to your own silly devices," said he, laying her down, and lingering to settle her pillows and shawls.

"Wise ones," said she. "I have so much to do. There 's baby — and there 's Mr. Harding to come, and I want to see the cook — and I should not wonder if I wrote to mamma. So you see 't is woman's work, and you had better not bring your red coat home too soon, or you 'll have to finish the letter!" she added, with saucy sweetness.

On his return, he found her spread all over with papers, her little table by her side, with the drawer pulled out.

"Ha! what mischief are you up to? You have not got at those abominable accounts again!".

"I beg your pardon," said she, humbly. "Nurse would not let me speak to the cook, but said instead I might write

to mamma; so I sent for my little table, but I found the drawer in such disorder, that I was setting it to rights. Who can have meddled with it?"

"I can tell you that," said Arthur. "I ran against it, and it came to grief, and there was a spread of all your goods and chattels on the floor."

"Oh! I am so glad! I was afraid some of the servants had been at it."

"What! aren't you in a desperate fright? All your secrets displayed, like a story, as you are so fond of saying — what's the name of it — where the husband, no, it was the wife, fainted away, and broke open the desk with her head."

"My dear Arthur!" and Violet laughed so much that nurse in the next room foreboded that he would tire her.

"I vow it was so! Out came a whole lot of letters from the old love, a colonel in the Peninsula, that her husband had never heard of, — an old lawyer he was."

"The husband? What made her marry him?"

"They were all ruined horse and foot, and the old love was wounded, *kilt*, or disposed of, till he turned up, married to her best friend."

"What became of her?"

"I forget — there was a poisoning and a paralytic stroke in it."

"Was there? How delightful! How I should like to read it. What was its name?"

"I don't remember. It was a green railway book. Theodora made me read it, and I should know it again if I saw it. I'll look out for it, and you'll find I was right about her head. But how now? Haven't you fainted away all this time?"

"No; why should I?"

"How do you know what I may have discovered in your papers? Are you prepared? It is no laughing matter," added he, in a Blue Beard tone, and drawing out the paper of calculations, he pointed to the tear marks. "Look here. What's this, I say, what's this, you naughty child?"

"I am sorry! it was very silly," whispered Violet, in a contrite, ashamed way, shrinking back a little.

"What business had you to break your heart over these trumpery butchers and bakers and candlestick makers?"

"Only candles, dear Arthur," said Violet, meekly, as if in extenuation.

"But what on earth could you find to cry about?"

"It was very foolish! but I was in such a dreadful puzzle. I could not make the cook's accounts and mine agree, and I wanted to be sure whether she really —"

"Cheated!" exclaimed Arthur. "Well, that's a blessing!"

"What is?" asked the astonished Violet.

"That I have cleared the house of that intolerable woman!"

"The cook gone!" cried Violet, starting, so that her papers slid away, and Arthur shuffled them up in his hand in renewed confusion. "The cook really gone! Oh! I am so glad!"

"Capital!" cried Arthur. "There was John declaring you would be in despair to find your precious treasure gone."

"Oh! I never was more glad! Do tell me! Why did she go?"

"I had a skrimmage with her about some trout Fitzhugh sent, which I verily believe she ate herself."

"Changed with the fishmonger!"

"I dare say. She sent us in some good-for-nothing wretches, all mud, and vowed these were stale — then grew impertinent."

"And talked about the first families?"

"Exactly so, and when it came to telling me Mrs. Martindale was her mistress, I could stand no more. I paid her her wages, and recommended her to make herself scarce."

"When did it happen?"

"Rather more than a fortnight ago."

Violet laughed heartily. "O-ho! there's the reason nurse scolds if I dare to ask to speak to the cook. And, oh!

how gravely Sarah said 'yes, Ma'am,' to all my messages! How very funny! But how have we been living? When I am having nice things all day long, and giving so much trouble! Oh dear! How uncomfortable you must have been, and your brother too!"

"Am I not always telling you to the contrary? Sarah made everything look as usual, and I suspect Brown lent a helping hand. John said, the coffee was made in some peculiar way Brown learnt in the East, and never practises unless John is very ill, or they are in some uncivilized place; but he told me to take no notice, lest Brown should think it *infra dig.*"

"I 'm afraid he thought this an uncivilized place. But what a woman Sarah is! She has all the work of the house, and yet she seems to me to be here as much as nurse!"

"She has got the work of ten horses in her, with the face of a death's head, and the voice of a walking sepulchre!"

"But isn't she a thorough good creature? I can't think what will become of me without her! It will be like parting with a friend."

"What would you part with her for? I thought she was the sheet-anchor."

"That she is; but she won't stay where there are children. She told me so long ago, and only stayed because I begged her for the present. She will go when I am well."

"Better give double wages to keep her," said Arthur.

"I 'd do anything I could, but I 'm afraid. I was quite dreading the getting about again, because I should have to lose Sarah, and to do something or other with that woman."

"What possessed you to keep her?"

"I wasn't sure about her. Your aunt recommended her, and I thought you might not like — and at first I did not know what things ought to cost, nor how long they ought to last; and that was what I did sums for. Then when I did prove it, I saw only dishonesty in the kitchen, and extravagance and mismanagement of my own."

"So the little goose sat and cried!"

"I could not help it. I felt I was doing wrong; that was the terrible part; and I am glad you know the worst. I have been very weak and silly, and wasted your money sadly, and I did not know how to help it; and that was what made me so miserable. And now, dear Arthur, only say you overlook my blunders, and indeed I 'll try to do better."

"Overlook! The only thing I don't know how to forgive is your having made yourself so ill with this nonsense."

"I can't be sorry for that," said Violet, smiling, though the tears came. "That has been almost all happiness. I shall have the heart to try more than ever — and I have some experience; and now that cook is gone, I really shall get on."

"Promise me you 'll never go bothering yourself for nothing another time. Take it easy! That 's the only way to get through the world."

"Ah! I will never be so foolish again. I shall never be afraid to make you attend to my difficulties."

"Afraid! That was the silliest part of all! But here — will you have another hundred a-year at once? and then there 'll be no trouble."

"Thank you, thank you! How kind of you! But do you know, I should like to try with what I have. I see it might be made to do, and I want to conquer the difficulty; if I can't, I will ask you for more."

"Well, that may be best. I could hardly spare a hundred pounds without giving up one of the horses; and I want to see you riding again."

"Besides, this illness must have cost you a terrible quantity of money. But I dare say I shall find the outgoings nothing to what the cook made them." And she was taking up the accounts, when he seized them, crumpling them in his hand. "Nonsense! Let them alone, or I shall put them in the fire at once."

"Oh, don't do that, pray!" cried she, starting, "or I shall be ruined. Oh, pray!"

"Very well;" and rising, and making a long arm, he

deposited them on the top of a high wardrobe. "There 's the way to treat obstinate women. You may get them down when you can go after them — I shan't."

"Ah! there 's baby awake!"

"So, I shall go after that book at the library; and then I 've plenty to tell you of inquiries for Mrs. Martindale. Good-bye, again."

Violet received her babe into her arms with a languid long-drawn sigh, as of one wearied out with happiness. "That he should have heard my confession, and only pet me the more! Foolish, wasteful thing that I am. Oh, babe! if I could only make you grow and thrive, no one would ever be so happy as your mamma."

Perhaps she thought so still more some hours later, when she awoke from a long sleep, and saw Arthur reading *Emilia Wyndham*, and quite ready to defend his assertion that the wife broke open the desk with her head.

CHAPTER III.

But there was one fairy who was offended because she was not invited to the Christening. — MOTHER BUNCH.

THEODORA had spent the winter in trying not to think of her brother.

She read, she tried experiments, she taught at the school, she instructed the dumb boy, talked to the curate, and took her share of such county gaieties as were not beneath the house of Martindale; but at every tranquil moment came the thought, "What are Arthur and his wife doing!"

There were rumours of the general admiration of Mrs. Martindale, whence she deduced vanity and extravagance; but she heard nothing more till Jane Gardner, a correspondent, who persevered in spite of scanty and infrequent answers, mentioned her call on poor Mrs. Martindale, who, she said, looked sadly altered, unwell, and out of spirits. Georgina had tried to persuade her to come out, but without success; she ought to have some one with her, for she

seemed to be a good deal alone, and no doubt it was trying; but, of course, she would soon have her mother with her.

He leaves her alone — he finds home dull! Poor Arthur! A moment of triumph was followed by another of compunction, since this was not a doll that he was neglecting, but a living creature, who could feel pain. But the anticipation of meeting Mrs. Moss, after all those vows against her, and the idea of seeing his house filled with vulgar relations, hardened Theodora against the wife, who had thus gained her point.

Thus came the morning, when her father interrupted breakfast with an exclamation of dismay, and John's tidings were communicated.

I wish I had been kind to her! shot across Theodora's mind with acute pain, and the image of Arthur in grief swallowed up everything else. "I will go with you, Papa — you will go at once!"

"Poor young thing!" said Lord Martindale; "she was as pretty a creature as I ever beheld, and I do believe, as good. Poor Arthur, I am glad he has John with him."

Lady Martindale wondered how John came there, — and remarks ensued on his imprudence in risking a spring in England. To Theodora this seemed indifference to Arthur's distress, and she impatiently urged her father to take her to him at once.

He would not have delayed had Arthur been alone; but since John was there, he thought their sudden arrival might be more encumbering than consoling, and decided to wait for a further account, and finish affairs that he could not easily leave.

Theodora believed no one but herself could comfort Arthur, and was exceedingly vexed. She chafed against her father for attending to his business — against her mother for thinking of John; and was in charity with no one except Miss Piper, who came out of Mrs. Nesbit's room red with swallowing down tears, and with the under lady's-maid, who could not help begging to hear if Mrs. Martindale was

so ill, for Miss Standaloft said, "My lady had been so nervous and hysterical in her own room, that she had been forced to give her camphor and sal volatile."

Never had Theodora been more surprised than to hear this of the mother whom she only knew as calm, majestic, and impassible. With a sudden impulse, she hastened to her room. She was with Mrs. Nesbit, and Theodora following, found her reading aloud, without a trace of emotion. No doubt it was a figment of Miss Standaloft, and there was a side-long glance of satisfaction in her aunt's eyes, which made Theodora so indignant, that she was obliged to retreat without a word.

Her own regret and compassion for so young a creature thus cut off were warm and keen, especially when the next post brought a new and delightful hope, the infant, of whose life John had yesterday despaired, was said to be improving. Arthur's child! Here was a possession for Theodora, an object for the affections so long yearning for something to love. She would bring it home, watch over it, educate it, be all the world to Arthur, doubly so for his son's sake. She dreamt of putting his child into his arms, and bidding him live for it, and awoke clasping the pillow!

What were her feelings when she heard Violet was out of danger? For humanity's sake, and for Arthur's, she rejoiced; but it was the downfall of a noble edifice. "How that silly young mother would spoil the poor child!"

"My brothers" had always been mentioned in Theodora's prayer, from infancy. It was the plural number, but the strength and fervency of petition were reserved for one; and with him she now joined the name of his child. But how pray for the son without the mother? It was positively a struggle; for Theodora had a horror of mockery and formality; but the duty was too clear, the evil which made it distasteful, too evident, not to be battled with; she remembered that she ought to pray for all mankind, even those who had injured her, and, on these terms, she added her brother's

wife. It was not much from her heart; a small beginning, but still it was a beginning, that might be blessed in time.

Lord Martindale wished the family to have gone to London immediately, but Mrs. Nesbit set herself against any alteration in their plans being made for the sake of Arthur's wife. They were to have gone only in time for the first drawing-room, and she treated as a personal injury the proposal to leave her sooner than had been originally intended; making her niece so unhappy that Lord Martindale had to yield. John's stay in London was a subject of much anxiety; and while Mrs. Nesbit treated it as an absurd trifling with his own health, and his father reproached himself for being obliged to leave Arthur to him, Theodora suffered from complicated jealousy. Arthur seemed to want John more than her, John risked himself in London, in order to be with Arthur and his wife.

She was very eager for his coming; and when she expected the return of the carriage which was sent to meet him at the Whitford station, she betook herself to the lodge, intending him to pick her up there, that she might skim the cream of his information.

The carriage appeared, but it seemed empty. That dignified, gentlemanly personage, Mr. Brown, alighted from the box, and advanced with affability, replying to her astonished query, "Mr. Martindale desired me to say he should be at home by dinner-time, Ma'am. He left the train at the Enderby station, and is gone round by Rickworth Priory, with a message from Mrs. Martindale to Lady Elizabeth Brandon."

Theodora stood transfixed; and Brown, a confidential and cultivated person, thought she waited for more information.

"Mr. Martindale has not much cough, Ma'am, and I hope, coming out of London will remove it entirely. I think it was chiefly excitement and anxiety that brought on a recurrence of it, for his health is decidedly improved. He desired me to mention that Mrs. Martindale is much better.

She is on the sofa to-day for the first time; and he saw her before leaving."

"Do you know how the little boy is?" Theodora could not help asking.

"He is a little stronger, thank you, Ma'am," said Brown, with much interest; "he has cried less these last few days. He is said to be extremely like Mrs. Martindale."

Brown remounted to his place, the carriage drove on, and Theodora impetuously walked along the avenue.

"That man is insufferable! Extremely like Mrs. Martindale! Servants' gossip! How could I go and ask him? John has perfectly spoilt a good servant in him! But John spoils everybody. The notion of that girl sending him on her messages! John, who is treated like something sacred by my father and mother themselves! Those damp Rickworth meadows! How could Arthur allow it? It would serve him right if he was to marry Emma Brandon after all!"

She would not go near her mother, lest she should give her aunt the pleasure of hearing where he was gone; but as she was coming down, dressed for dinner, she met her father in the hall, uneasily asking a servant whether Mr. Martindale was come.

"Arthur's wife has sent him with a message to Rickworth," she said.

"John? You don't mean it. You have not seen him?"

"No; he went round that way, and sent Brown home. He said he should be here by dinner-time, but it is very late. Is it not a strange proceeding of hers, to be sending him about the country?"

"I don't understand it. Where 's Brown?"

"Here 's a fly coming up the avenue. He is come at last."

Lord Martindale hastened down the steps; Theodora came no further than the door, in so irritated a state that she did not like John's cheerful alacrity of step and greeting. "She is up to-day, she is getting better," were the first words she heard. "Well, Theodora, how are you?" and he kissed her with more warmth than she returned.

"Did I hear you had been to Rickworth?" said his father.

"Yes; I sent word by Brown. Poor Violet is still so weak that she cannot write, and the Brandons have been anxious about her; so she asked me to let them know how she was, if I had the opportunity, and I came round that way. I wanted to know when they go to London; for though Arthur is as attentive as possible, I don't think Violet is in a condition to be left entirely to him. When do you go?"

"Not till the end of May — just before the drawing-room," said Lord Martindale.

"I go back when they can take the boy to church. Is my mother in the drawing-room? I'll just speak to her, and dress — it is late I see."

"How well he seems," said Lord Martindale, as John walked quickly on before.

"There was a cough," said Theodora.

"Yes; but so cheerful. I have not seen him so animated for years. He must be better!"

His mother was full of delight. "My dear John, you look so much better! Where have you been?"

"At Rickworth. I went to give Lady Elizabeth an account of Violet. She is much better."

"And you have been after sunset in that river fog! My dear John!"

"There was no fog; and it was a most pleasant drive. I had no idea Rickworth was so pretty. Violet desired me to thank you for your kind messages. You should see her to-day, mother; she would be quite a study for you; she looks so pretty on her pillows, poor thing! and Arthur is come out quite in a new character — as an excellent nurse."

"Poor thing! I am glad she is recovering," said Lady Martindale. "It was very kind in you to stay with Arthur. I only hope you have not been hurting yourself."

"No, thank you; I came away in time, I believe: but I

should have been glad to have stayed on, unless I made room for some one of more use to Violet."

"I wish you had come home sooner. We have had such a pleasant dinner-party. You would have liked to meet the professor."

It was not the first time John had been sensible that that drawing-room was no place for sympathy; and he felt it the more now, because he had been living in such entire participation of his brother's hopes and fears, that he could hardly suppose any one could be less interested in the mother and child in Cadogan-place. He came home, wishing Theodora would go and relieve Arthur of some of the care Violet needed in her convalescence; and he was much disappointed by her apparent indifference — in reality, a severe fit of perverse jealousy.

All dinner-time she endured a conversation on the subjects for which she least cared; nay, she talked ardently about the past dinner-party, for the very purpose of preventing John from suspecting that her anxiety had prevented her from enjoying it. And when she left the dining-room, she felt furious at knowing that now her father would have all the particulars to himself, so that none would transpire to her.

She longed so much to hear of Arthur and his child, that when John came into the drawing-room she could have asked! But he went to greet his aunt, who received him thus:

"Well, I am glad to see you at last. You ought to have good reasons for coming to England for the May east winds, and then exposing yourself to them in London!"

"I hope I did not expose myself: I only went out three or four times."

"I know you are always rejoiced to be as little at home as possible."

"I could not be spared sooner, Ma'am."

"Spared? I think you have come out in a new capacity."

John never went to his aunt without expecting to undergo a penance.

"I was sorry no one else could be with Arthur; but being there, I could not leave him."

"And your mother tells me you are going back again?"

"Yes, to stand godfather."

"To the son and heir, as they called him in the paper. I gave Arthur credit for better taste; I suppose it was done by some of her connexions?"

"I was that connexion," said John.

"Oh! I suppose you know what expectations you will raise?"

John making no answer, she grew more angry. "This one, at least, is never likely to be heir, from what I hear; it is only surprising that it is still alive."

How Theodora hung upon the answer, her very throat aching with anxiety; but hardening her face because John looked towards her.

"We were very much afraid for him at first," he said; "but they now think there is no reason he should not do well. He began to improve from the time she could attend to him."

A deep sigh from his mother startled John, and recalled the grief of his childhood — the loss of two young sisters who had died during her absence on the continent. He crossed over and stood near her, between her and his aunt, who, in agitated haste to change the conversation, called out to ask her about some club-book. For once she did not attend; and while Theodora came forward and answered Mrs. Nesbit, she tremulously asked John if he had seen the child.

"Only once, before he was an hour old. He was asleep when I came away; and, as Arthur says, it is a serious thing to disturb him, he cries so much."

"A little low melancholy wailing," she said, with a half sob. But Mrs. Nesbit would not leave her at peace any longer, and her voice came beyond the screen of John's figure: —

"Lady Martindale, my dear, have you done with those books? They ought to be returned."

"Which, dear aunt?" And Lady Martindale started up as if she had been caught off duty, and, with a manifest effort, brought her wandering thoughts back again to say which were read and which were unread.

John did not venture to revert to a subject that affected his mother so strongly; but he made another attempt upon his sister, when he could speak to her apart. "Arthur has been wondering not to hear from you."

"Every one has been writing," she answered, coldly.

"He wants some relief from his constant attendance," continued John; "I was afraid at first it would be too much for him, sitting up three nights consecutively, and even now he has not at all recovered his looks."

"Is he looking ill?" said Theodora.

"He has gone through a great deal, and when she tries to make him go out, he only goes down to smoke. You would do a great deal of good if you were there."

Theodora would not reply. For Arthur to ask her to come and be godmother was the very thing she wished; but she would not offer at John's bidding, especially when Arthur was more than ever devoted to his wife; so she made no sign; and John repented of having said so much, thinking that, in such a humour, the farther she was from them the better.

Yet what he had said might have worked, had not a history of the circumstances of Violet's illness come round to her by way of Mrs. Nesbit. John had told his father; Lord Martindale told his wife; Lady Martindale told her aunt, under whose colouring the story reached Theodora, that Arthur's wife had been helpless and inefficient, had done nothing but cry over her household affairs, could not bear to be left alone, and that the child's premature birth had been occasioned by a fit of hysterics because Arthur had gone out fishing. No wonder Theodora pitied the one brother, and thought the other infatuated. To write to Arthur was out of the question; and she could only look forward to consoling him when the time for London should come. Nor

was she much inclined to compassionate John, when, as he said, the east wind — as his aunt said, the London fog — as she thought, the Rickworth meadows — brought on such an accession of cough that he was obliged to confine himself to his two rooms, where he felt unusually solitary.

"She went in one day to carry him the newspaper. "I am writing to Arthur," he said, "to tell him that I shall not be able to be in London next Sunday; do you like to put in a note?"

"No, I thank you."

"You have no message?"

"None."

He paused and looked at her. "I wish you would write," he said. "Arthur has been watching eagerly for your congratulation."

"He does not give much encouragement," said Theodora, moving to the door.

"I wish he was a letter writer! After being so long with them, I don't like hearing nothing more; but his time has been so much engrossed, that he could hardly have written at first. I believe the first letter he looked for was from you."

"I don't know what to say. Other people have said all the common-place things."

"You would not speak in that manner — you who used to be so fond of Arthur — if you by any means realized what he has gone through."

Theodora was touched, but would not show it. "He does not want me now," she said, and was gone, and then her lips relaxed, and she breathed a heavy sigh.

John sighed too. He could not understand her, and was sensible that his own isolation was as a consequence of having lived absorbed in his affection and his grief, without having sought the intimacy of his sister. His brother's family cares had for the first time led him to throw himself into the interests of those around him, and thus aroused from the contemplation of his loss, he began to look with

regret on opportunities neglected and influence wasted. The stillness of his own room did not as formerly suffice to him; the fears and hopes he had lately been sharing rose more vividly before him, and he watched eagerly for the reply to his letter.

It came, not from Arthur, but in the pointed style of Violet's hardest steel pen, when Matilda's instructions were most full in her mind; stiff, cramped, and formal, as if it had been a great effort to write it, and John was grieved to find that she was still in no state for exertion. She had scarcely been downstairs, and neither she nor the baby were as yet likely to be soon able to leave the house, in spite of all the kind care of Lady Elizabeth and Miss Brandon. Violet made numerous apologies for the message, which she had little thought would cause Mr. Martindale to alter his route.

In fact, those kind friends had been so much affected by John's account of Violet's weak state, under no better nursing than Arthur's, that, as he had hoped, they had hastened their visit to London, and were now settled as near to her as possible, spending nearly the whole of their time with her. Emma almost idolized the baby, and was delighted at Arthur's grateful request that she would be its sponsor, and Violet was as happy in their company as the restlessness of a mind which had not yet recovered its tone, would allow her to be.

In another fortnight John wrote to say that he found he had come home too early, and must go to the Isle of Wight till the weather was warmer. In passing through London, he would come to Cadogan-place, and it was decided that he should arrive in time to go with the baby to church on the Tuesday, and proceed the next morning.

He arrived as Violet came down to greet her party of sponsors. Never had she looked prettier than when her husband led her into the room, her taper figure so graceful in her somewhat languid movements, and her countenance so sweetly blending the expression of child and mother. Each

white cheek was tinged with exquisite rose colour, and the dark liquid eyes and softly smiling mouth had an affectionate pensiveness far lovelier than her last year's bloom, and yet there was something painful in that beauty — it was too like the fragility of the flower fading under one hour's sunshine; and there was a sadness in seeing the matronly stamp on a face so young that it should have shown only girlhood's freedom from care. Arthur indeed was boasting of the return of the colour, which spread and deepened as he drew attention to it; but John and Lady Elizabeth agreed, as they walked to church, that it was the very token of weakness, and that with every kind intention Arthur did not know how to take care of her — how should he?

The cheeks grew more brilliant and burning at church, for on being carried to the font, the baby made his doleful notes heard, and when taken from his nurse, they rose into a positive roar. Violet looked from him to his father's face, and there saw so much discomposure that her wretchedness was complete, enhanced as it was by a sense of wickedness in not being able to be happy and grateful. Just as when a few days previously she had gone to return thanks, she had been in a nervous state of fluttering and trembling that allowed her to dwell on nothing but the dread of fainting away. The poor girl's nerves had been so completely overthrown, that even her powers of mind seemed to be suffering, and her agitated manner quite alarmed Lady Elizabeth. She was in good hands, however; Lady Elizabeth went home with her, kept every one else away, and nursing her in her own kind way, brought her back to common sense, for in the exaggeration of her weak spirits, she had been feeling as if it was she who had been screaming through the service, and seriously vexing Arthur.

He presently looked in himself to say the few fond merry words that were only needed to console her, and she was then left alone to rest, not tranquil enough for sleep, but reading hymns, and trying to draw her thoughts up to what

she thought they ought to be on the day of her child's baptismal vows.

It was well for her that the christening dinner (a terror to her imagination) had been deferred till the family should be in town, and that she had no guest but John, who was very sorry to see how weary and exhausted she looked, as if it was a positive effort to sit at the head of the table.

When the two brothers came up to the drawing-room, they found her on the sofa. "Regularly done for!" said Arthur, sitting down by her. "You ought to have gone to bed, you perverse woman."

"I shall come to life after tea," said she, beginning to rise as signs of its approach were heard.

"Lie still, I say," returned Arthur, settling the cushion. "Do you think no one can make tea but yourself? Out with the key, and lie still."

"I hope, Violet," said John, "you did not think the Red Republicans had been in your drawers and boxes. I am afraid Arthur may have cast the blame of his own doings on the absent, though I assure you I did my best to protect them."

"Indeed he did you more justice," said Violet; "he told me the box was your setting to rights, and the drawer his. It was very honest of him, for I must say the box did you most credit."

"As to the drawer," said Arthur, "I wish I had put it into the fire at once! Those accounts are a monomania! She has been worse from the day she got hold of that book of hers again, and the absurd part of it is that these are all bills that she pays!"

"Oh! they are all comfortable now," said Violet.

"And what did you say to Arthur's bold stroke?" said John.

"Oh! I never laughed more in my life."

"Ah ha!" said Arthur, "it was all my admirable sagacity! Why, John, the woman was an incubus saddled upon us by Miss Standaloft, that this poor silly child did not know how

to get rid of, though she was cheating us out of house and home. Never were such rejoicings as when she found the Old Man of the Sea was gone!"

"It is quite a different thing now," said Violet. "Nurse found me such a nice niece of her own, who does not consume as much in a fortnight as that dreadful woman did in a week. Indeed, my great book has some satisfaction in it now."

"And yet he accuses it of having thrown you back."

"Everything does that!" said Arthur. "She will extract means of tiring herself out of anything — pretends to be well, and then is good for nothing!"

"Arthur! Arthur! do you know what you are doing with the tea?" cried Violet, starting up. "He has put in six shellfuls for three people, and a lump of sugar, and now was shutting up the unfortunate teapot without one drop of water!" And gaily driving him away, she held up the sugar-tongs with the lump of sugar in his face, while he laughed and yielded the field, saying, disdainfully, "Woman's work."

"Under the circumstances," said John, "putting in no water was the best thing he could do."

"Ay!" said Arthur, "a pretty fellow you for a West Indian proprietor, to consume neither sugar nor cigars."

"At this rate," said John, "they are the people to consume nothing. There was such an account of the Barbuda property the other day, that my father is thinking of going to see what is to be done with it."

"No bad plan for your next winter," said Arthur. "Now, Violet, to your sofa! You have brewed your female potion in your female fashion, and may surely leave your betters to pour it out."

"No, indeed! How do I know what you may serve us up?" said she, quite revived with laughing. "I won't give up my place."

"Quite right, Violet," said John, "don't leave me to his mercy. Last time he made tea for me, it consisted only of

the other ingredient, hot water, after which I took the law into my own hands for our mutual benefit. Pray what became of him after I was gone?"

"I was obliged to have him up into my room, and give him his tea properly there, or I believe he would have existed on nothing but cigars."

"Well, I shall have some opinion of you when you make him leave off cigars."

"Catch her!" quietly responded Arthur.

"There can't be a worse thing for a man that gets bad coughs."

"That's all smoke, Violet," said Arthur. "Don't tell her so, or I shall never have any peace."

"At least, I advise you to open the windows of his den before you show my mother and Theodora the house."

"As to Theodora! what is the matter with her?" said Arthur.

"I don't know," said John.

"In one of her moods? Well! we shall have her here in ten days' time, and I shall know what to be at with her."

"I know she likes babies," said Violet, with confidence.

She had quite revived, and was lively and amused; but as soon as tea was over, Arthur insisted on her going to bed.

The loss of her gentle mirth seemed to be felt; for a long silence ensued; Arthur leaning against the mantel-shelf, solacing himself with a low whistle, John sitting in meditation. At last he looked up, saying, "I wish you would all come and stay with me at Ventnor."

"Thank you; but you see there 's no such thing as my going. Fitzhugh is in Norway, and till he comes back, I can't get away for more than a day or two."

"Suppose," said John, rather doubtingly; "what should you think of putting Violet under my charge, and coming backwards and forwards yourself?"

"Why, Harding did talk of sea air, but she did not take to the notion; and I was not sorry; for, of all things I detest, the chief is sticking up in a sea place, with nothing to do.

But it is wretched work going on as we do, though they say there is nothing the matter but weakness. I verily believe it is all that child's eternal noise that regularly wears her out. She is upset in a moment; and whenever she is left alone, she sets to work on some fidget or other about the house, that makes her worse than before."

"Going from home would be the best cure for that."

"I suppose it would. I meant her to have gone out with my mother, but that can't be anyway now! The sea would give her a chance; I could run down pretty often; and you would see that she did not tire herself."

"I would do my best to take care of her, if you would trust her to me."

"I know you would; and it is very kind in you to think of it."

"I will find a house, and write as soon as it is ready. Do you think the end of the week would be too soon for her? I am sure London is doing her harm."

"Whenever you please; and yet I am sorry. I wanted my father to have seen the boy; but perhaps he had better look a little more respectable, and learn to hold his tongue first. Besides, how will it be taken, her going out of town just as they come up?"

"I rather think it would be better for her not to meet them till she is stronger. Her continual anxiety and effort to please would be too much strain."

"Very likely; and I am sure I won't keep her here to expose her to Miss Martindale's airs. She shall come as soon as you like."

Arthur was strengthened in his determination by the first sound that met him on going upstairs — the poor babe's lamentable voice; and by finding Violet, instead of taking the rest she so much needed, vainly trying to still the feeble moaning. He was positively angry; and almost as if the poor little thing had been wilfully persecuting her, declared it would be the death of her, and peremptorily ordered it upstairs; the nurse only too glad to carry it off, and agreeing

with him that it was doing more harm to its mother than she did good to it. Violet, in submissive misery, gave it up, and hid her face. One of her chief subjects for self-torment was an imagination that Arthur did not like the baby, and was displeased with its crying; and she felt utterly wretched, hardly able to bear the cheerful tone in which he spoke! "Well, Violet, we shall soon set you up. It is all settled. You are to go, at the end of the week, to stay with John in the Isle of Wight."

"Go away?" said Violet, in an extinguished voice.

"Yes; it is the very thing for you. I shall stay here, and go backwards and forwards. Well, what is it now?"

She was starting up, as the opening of the door let out another scream. "There he is still! Let me go to him for one minute."

"Folly!" said Arthur, impatiently. "There 's no peace day or night. I won't stand it any longer. You are half dead already. I will not have it go on. Lie down; go to sleep directly, and don't trouble your head about anything more till morning."

Like a good child, though choking with tears, she obeyed the first mandate; and presently was rather comforted by his listening at the foot of the stairs, and reporting that the boy seemed to be quiet at last. The rest of the order it was not in her power to obey; she was too much fatigued to sleep soundly, or to understand clearly. Most of the night was spent in broken dreams of being separated from her child and her husband, and wakening to the knowledge that something was going to happen.

At last came sounder slumbers; and she awoke with an aching head, but to clearer perceptions. And when Arthur, before going down to breakfast, asked what she wished him to say to John, she answered: "It is very kind of him — but you never meant me to go without you?"

"I shall take you there, and run down pretty often; and John has been used to *coddling* himself all his life, so of course he will know how to take care of you."

"How kind he is, but I don't"—she broke off, and looked at the little pinched face and shrivelled arms of the tiny creature, which she pressed more closely to her; then, with a hesitating voice, "Only, if it would do baby good!"

"Of course it would. He can't be well while things go on at this rate. Only ask Harding."

"I wonder whether Mr. Martindale knew it was what Mr. Harding recommended! But you would be by yourself."

"As if I had not taken care of myself for three-and-twenty years without your help!"

"And all your party will be in town, so that you will not miss me."

"I shall be with you very often. Shall I tell John you accept?"

"Tell him it is very kind, and I am so much obliged to him," said Violet, unable to speak otherwise than disconsolately.

Accordingly the brothers agreed that Arthur should bring her to Ventnor on Saturday, if, as John expected, he could be prepared to receive her; placing much confidence in Brown's *savoir-faire*, though Brown was beyond measure amazed at such a disarrangement of his master's methodical habits; and Arthur himself gave a commiserating shake of the head as he observed that there was no accounting for tastes, but if John chose to shut himself up in a lodging with the most squallingest babby in creation, he was not the man to gainsay him; and further reflected, that if a man must be a younger son, John was a model elder brother.

Poor Violet! Her half-recovered state must be an excuse for her dire consternation on hearing it was definitively settled that she was to be carried off to Ventnor in four days' time! How arrange for Arthur? Where find a nursemaid? What would become of the baby so far from Mr. Harding? The Isle of Wight seemed the ends of the earth — out of England! Helpless and overpowered, she was in despair; it came to Arthur's asking, in displeasure, what she wanted —

whether she meant to go or not. She thought of her drooping infant, and said at once she would go.

"Well, then, what 's all this about?"

Then came tears, and Arthur went away, declaring she did not know herself what she would be at. He had really borne patiently with much plaintiveness, and she knew it. She accused herself of ingratitude and unreasonableness, and went into a fresh agony on that score; but soon a tap at the door warned her to strive for composure. It was Sarah, and Violet felt sure that the dreaded moment was come of her giving warning; but it was only a message. "If you please, Ma'am, there 's a young person wants to see you."

"Come as a nursery maid?" said Violet, springing up in her nervous agitated way. "Do you think she will do?"

"I don't think nothing of her," said Sarah, emphatically. "Don't you go and be in a way, Ma'am; there 's no hurry."

"Yes, but there is, Sarah. Baby and I are to go next Saturday to the Isle of Wight, and I can't take old nurse; I must have some one."

"You won't get nobody by hurrying," said Sarah.

"But what 's to be done, Sarah? I can't bear giving the dear baby to a stranger, but I can't help it."

"As for that," said Sarah, gloomily, "I don't see but I could look after Master John as well as any that is like to offer for the present."

"You! Oh! that would be nice! But I thought you did not like children?"

"I don't; but I don't mind while he is too little to make a racket, and worrit one out of one's life. It is only for the present, till you can suit yourself, Ma'am—just that you may not be lost going into foreign parts with a stranger."

Sarah had been nursing the baby every leisure moment, and had, during the worst part of Violet's illness, had more to do with him than the regular nurse. This was happily settled; and all at which Violet still demurred was how the house and its master should be provided for in their absence; to which Sarah replied, "Mary would do well enough for

he;" and before Violet knew to which she must suppose the pronoun referred, there was a new comer, Lady Elizabeth, telling her that Arthur had just been to beg her to come to her, saying he feared he had hurried her and taken her by surprise.

Under such kind soothing Violet's rational mind returned. She ceased to attempt to put herself into a vehement state of preparation, and began to take so cheerful a view of affairs, that she met Arthur again in excellent spirits.

Emma Brandon pitied her for being left alone with Mr. Martindale, but this was no subject of dread to her, and she confessed that she was relieved to escape the meeting with the rest of the family. The chief regret was, that the two friends would miss the constant intercourse with which they had flattered themselves; the only thing that made London endurable to poor Emma. She amused Violet with her lamentations over her gaieties, and her piteous accounts of the tedium of parties and balls; whereas Violet declared that she liked them very much — "it was pleasant to walk about with Arthur and hear his droll remarks, and she liked seeing people look nice and well dressed."

"Ah! you are better off. You are not obliged to dance, and you are safe too. Now, whenever any one asks to be introduced to me I am sure he wants the Priory, and feel bound to guard it."

"And so you don't like any one, and find it stupid."

"So I do, of course, and I hope I always shall. But oh! Violet, I have not told you that I saw that lady again this morning at the early service. She had still her white dress on, I am sure it is for Whitsuntide; and her face is so striking — so full of thought and earnestness, just like what one would suppose a novice. I shall take her for my romance, and try to guess at her history."

"To console you for your godson going away?"

"Ah! it won't do that! But it will be something to think of, and I will report to you if I make out any more about her. And mind you give me a full account of the godson."

Arthur wished the journey well over; he had often felt a sort of superior pity for travellers with a baby in company, and did not relish the prospect; but things turned out well, he found an acquaintance, and travelled with him in a different carriage, and little Johnnie, lulled by the country air, slept so much that Violet had leisure to enjoy the burst into country scenery, and be refreshed by the glowing beauty of the green meadows, the budding woods, and the brilliant feathery broom blossoms that gilded the embankments. At Winchester Arthur came to her window, and asked if she remembered last year.

"It is the longest year of my life," said she. "O, don't laugh as if I had made a bad compliment, but so much has happened!" There was no time for more; and as she looked out at the cathedral as they moved on, she recollected her resolutions, and blamed herself for her failures, but still in a soothed and happier frame of hope.

The crossing was her delight, her first taste of sea. There was a fresh wind, cold enough to make Arthur put on his great coat, but to her it brought a delicious sense of renewed health and vigour, as she sat inhaling it, charmed to catch a drop of spray on her face, her eyes and cheeks brightening and her spirits rising.

The sparkling Solent, the ships at Spithead, the hills and wooded banks, growing more defined before her; the town of Ryde and its long pier, were each a new wonder and delight, and she exclaimed, with such ecstacy, and laughed so like the joyous girl she used to be, that Arthur felt old times come back; and when he handed her out of the steamer he entirely forgot the baby!

At last she was tired with pleasure, and lay back in the carriage in languid enjoyment; fields, cottages, hawthorns, lilacs, and glimpses of sea flitting past her like pictures in a dream, a sort of waking trance that would have been broken by speaking or positive thinking.

They stopped at a gate; she looked up and gave a cry of delight. Such a cottage as she and Annette had figured in

dreams of rural bliss, gable-ends, thatch, verandah overrun with myrtle, rose, and honeysuckle, a little terrace, a steep green slope of lawn shut in with laburnum and lilac in the flush of the lovely close of May, a view of the sea, a green wicket, bowered over with clematis, and within it, John Martindale, his look of welcome overpowering his usual gravity, so as to give him an air of gladness such as she had never seen in him before.

CHAPTER IV.

The inmost heart of man if glad
  Partakes a livelier cheer,
And eyes that cannot but be sad
  Let fall a brightened tear.
Since thy return, through days and weeks
  Of hope that grew by stealth,
How many wan and faded cheeks
  Have kindled into health.

WORDSWORTH'S *Ode to May.*

"I SAY," called Arthur, standing half in and half out of the French window, as Sarah paced round the little garden, holding a parasol over her charge, "if that boy kicks up a row at night, don't mind Mrs. Martindale. Carry him off, and lock the door. D'ye hear?"

"Yes, Sir," said the unmoved Sarah.

"Stern, rugged nurse!" said Arthur, drawing in his head. "Your boy ought to be virtue itself, Violet. Now for you, John, if you see her at those figures, take them away. Don't let her think what two and two make."

"You are like one of my little sisters giving her doll to the other to keep," said Violet.

"Some folks say it is a doll, don't they, John?".

"Well, I will try to take as much care of your doll as she does of hers," said John, smiling.

"Good-bye, then! I wish I could stay!"

Violet went to the gate with him, while John stood at the window watching the slender girlish figure under the canopy of clematis, as she stood gazing after her husband, then

turned and slowly paced back again, her eyes on the ground, and her face rather sad and downcast.

That pretty creature was a strange new charge for him, and he dreaded her pining almost as he would have feared the crying of a child left alone with him.

"Well, Violet," said he, cheerfully, "we must do our best. What time would you like to take a drive?"

"Any time, thank you," said she, gratefully, but somewhat plaintively; "but do not let me be a trouble to you. Sarah is going to hire a chair for me to go down to the beach. I only want not to be in your way."

"I have nothing to do. You know I am no great walker, and I am glad of an excuse for setting up my carriage. Shall we dine early, and go out when the sun is not so high?"

"Thank you! that will be delightful. I want to see those beautiful places that I was too tired to look at on Saturday."

Sarah's rounds again brought her in sight; Violet crossed the grass, and the next moment was under the verandah with the little long-robed chrysalis shape in her arms, declaring he was growing quite good, and getting fat already; and though to John's eyes the face was as much as ever like a very wizened old man, he could not but feel heartfelt pleasure in seeing her for once enjoying a young mother's exultation.

"Poor thing!" said he to himself, as she carried the babe upstairs, "she has done too much, thought too much, felt too much for her years. Life has begun before she has strength for the heat and burthen of the day. The only hope is in keeping those overtasked spirits at rest, guarding her from care, and letting her return to childhood. And should this work fall on me, broken down in spirits and energy, with these long-standing habits of solitude and silence? If Helen was but here!"

He was relieved by Violet's re-appearance at dinner time, full of smiles, proud of Johnnie's having slept half the morning, and delighted with *Mary Barton*, which on his system of diversion for her mind, he had placed in her way. She

was amazed and charmed at finding that he could discuss the tale with interest and admiration.

"Arthur calls such books trash," said she.

"He reads them, though."

"Yes, he always reads the third volume while I read the first."

"The best way. I always begin at the end to judge whether a book is worth reading."

"I saw a French book on the table; are you reading it?"

"Consulting it. You are welcome to it."

"I think," she said, timidly, "I ought to read some history and French, or I shall never be fit to teach my little boy."

"I have a good many books at home, entirely at your service."

"Thank you, thank you! I thought last winter if I could but have read, I should not have minded half so much."

"And why could you not?"

"I had finished all my own books, and they cost too much to hire, so there was only a great Roman history that Arthur had had at school. I could not read more than thirty pages of that a-day, it was so stupid."

"And you read those as a task! Very wise!"

"Matilda said my education was incomplete, and she feared I should be found deficient; and mamma told me to make a point of reading something improving every day, but I have not begun again."

"I have some work on my hands," said John. "I was with Percy Fotheringham eight years ago in Syria and Asia Minor. He has gone over the same places a second time, and has made the journals up into a book on the Crusaders, which he has sent from Constantinople for me to get ready for publication. I shall come to you for help."

"Me! How can I?" exclaimed Violet, colouring with astonishment.

"Let us enjoy our holiday first," he replied, smiling. "See there."

A low open carriage and a pair of ponies came to the gate; Violet was enchanted, and stood admiring and patting them, while John looked on amused, telling her he was glad she approved, for he had desired Brown to find something in which Captain Martindale would not be ashamed to see her.

They drove along the Undercliff, and her enjoyment was excessive. To one so long shut up in town, the fresh air, blue sky, and green trees were charms sufficient in themselves, and when to these were added the bright extent of summer sea, the beautiful curving outline of the bay ending in the bold Culver Cliffs; and the wall of rocks above, clothed in part with garland-like shrubs and festoons of creepers, it was to her a perfect vision of delight. There was an alternation of long pauses of happy contemplation, and of smothered exclamations of ecstasy, as if eye and heart were longing to take a still fuller grasp of the beauty of the scene. The expression her face had worn at the cathedral entrance was on it now, and seemed to put a new soul into her features, varied by the beaming smiles as she cried out joyously at each new object — the gliding sails on the water, the curious forms of the crags, or the hawks that poised themselves in the air.

The flowers, too! They came to a lane bordered with copse, blue with wild hyacinth. "Oh! it was so long since she had seen a wild flower! Would he be so kind as to stop for one moment to let her gather one. She did so much wish to pick a flower for herself once more!"

He drew up, and sat, leaning back, watching her with one of his smiles of melancholy meaning, as she lightly sprang up the bank, and dived between the hazel stems; and there he remained musing till, like a vision of May herself, she re-appeared on the bank, the nut-bushes making a bower around her, her hands filled with flowers, her cheek glowing like her wild roses, and the youthful delicacy of her form, and the transient brightness of her sweet face,

suiting with the fresh tender colouring of the foliage chequered with flickering sunshine.

"Oh! I hope I have not kept you waiting too long! but, indeed, I did not know how to turn back. I went after an orchis, and then I saw some Solomon's seal; and oh! such blue-bells, and I could not help standing quite still to feel how delicious it was! I hope that it was not long."

"No, not at all, I am glad."

There was a moisture around the bright eyes, and perhaps she felt a little childish shame, for she put up her hand to brush it off. "It is very silly," she said. "Beautiful places ought not to make one ready to cry — and yet somehow, when I stood quite still, and it was all so green, and I heard the cuckoo and all the little birds singing, it would come over me! I could not help thinking who made it all so beautiful, and that He gave me my baby too." — And there, as having said too much, she blushed in confusion, and began to busy herself with her flowers, delighting herself in silence over each many-belled hyacinth, each purple orchis, streaked wood sorrel, or delicate wreath of eglantine, deeming each in turn the most perfect she had ever seen.

John let her alone; he thought the May blossoms more suitable companions for her than himself, and believed that it would only interfere with that full contentment to be recalled to converse with him. It was pleasure enough to watch that child-like gladsomeness, like studying a new life, and the relief it gave him to see her so happy perhaps opened his mind to somewhat of the same serene enjoyment.

That evening, when Brown, on bringing in the tea, gave an anxious glance to judge how his master fared, he augured from his countenance that the change of habits was doing him no harm.

In the evening, Mr. Fotheringham's manuscript was brought out: John could never read aloud, but he handed over the sheets to her, and she enjoyed the vivid descriptions and anecdotes of adventures, further illustrated by comments and details from John, far more entertaining than

those designed for the public. This revision was their usual evening occupation, and she soon became so well instructed in those scenes, that she felt as if she had been one of the travellers, and had known the handsome Arab sheik, whose chivalrous honour was only alloyed by desire of backsheesh, the Turkish guard who regularly deserted on the first alarm, and the sharp knavish Greek servant with his contempt for them all, more especially for the grave and correct Mr. Brown, pining to keep up Martindale etiquette in desert, caravanserai, and lazzeretto. She went along with them in the researches for Greek inscription, Byzantine carving, or Frank fortress; she shared the exultation of decyphering the ancient record in the venerable mountain convent, the disappointment when Percy's admirable entrenched camp of Bohemond proved to be a case of "prætorian here, prætorian there;" she listened earnestly to the history, too deeply felt to have been recorded for the general reader, of the feelings which had gone with the friends to the cedars of Lebanon, the streams of Jordan, the peak of Tabor, the cave of Bethlehem, the hills of Jerusalem. Perhaps she looked up the more to John, when she knew that he had trod that soil, and with so true a pilgrim's heart. Then the narration led her through the purple mountain islets of the Archipelago, and the wondrous scenery of classic Greece, with daring adventures among robber Albanians, such as seemed too strange for the quiet inert John Martindale, although the bold and gay temper of his companion appeared to be in its own element; and in truth it was as if there was nothing that came amiss to Percival Fotheringham, who was equally ready for deep and scholarly dissertation, or for boyish drollery and good-natured tricks. He had a peculiar talent for languages, and had caught almost every dialect of the natives, as well as being an excellent Eastern scholar, and this had led to his becoming attached to the embassy at Constantinople, where John had left him on returning to England. He was there highly esteemed, and in the way of promotion, to the great satis-

faction of John, who took a sort of affectionate fatherly pride in his well doing.

The manuscript evinced so much ability and research, and was so full of beautiful and poetical description, as not only charmed Violet, but surpassed even John's expectations; and great was his delight in dwelling on its perfections, while he touched it up and corrected it with a doubtful respectful hand, scarcely perceiving how effective were his embellishments and refinements. Violet's remarks and misunderstandings were useful, and as she grew bolder, her criticisms were often much to the point. She was set to search in historical authorities, and to translate from the French for the notes, work which she thought the greatest honour, and which kept her mind happily occupied to the exclusion of her cares.

Fresh air, busy idleness, the daily renewed pleasure of beautiful scenery, the watchful care of her kind brother, and the progressive improvement of her babe, produced the desired effect; and when the promised day arrived, and they walked to the coach-office to meet Arthur, it was a triumph to hear him declare that he had been thinking that for once he saw a pretty girl before he found out it was Violet, grown rosy in her sea-side bonnet.

If the tenor of John's life had been far less agreeable, it would have been sufficiently compensated by the pleasure of seeing how happy he had made the young couple, so joyously engrossed with each other, and full of spirits and merriment.

Violet, gladsome and blithe at meeting her husband again, and Arthur, wholesomely and affectionately gay, appearing to uncommon advantage. He spoke warmly of his father. It seemed that they had been much together, and had understood each other better than ever before. Arthur repeated gratifying things which Lord Martindale had said of Violet, and, indeed, it was evident that interest in her was the way to find out his heart. Of his mother and sister there was less mention, and John began to gather the

state of the case as he listened in the twilight of the summer evening, while Arthur and Violet sat together on the sofa, and he leant back in his chair opposite to them, his book held up to catch the fading light; but his attention fixed on their talk over Arthur's news.

"You have not told me about the drawing-room."

"Do you think I am going there till I am obliged?"

"What! You did not go with Lady Martindale and Theodora. I should like to have seen them dressed. Do tell me how they looked."

"Splendid, no doubt; but you must take it on trust."

"You did not see them? What a pity! How disappointed Theodora must have been!"

"Were there not folks enough to look at her?"

"As if they were of any use without you."

"Little goose! I am not her husband, thank goodness, and wishing him joy that gets her."

"O, Arthur, don't! I want to hear of Lady Albury's party. You did go to that!"

"Yes, my mother lugged me into it, and a monstrous bore it was. I wish you had been there."

"Thank you, but if it was so dull —"

"Emma Brandon and I agreed that there was not a woman who would have been looked at twice if you had been there. We wanted you for a specimen of what is worth seeing. Fancy! it was such a dearth of good looks that they were making a star of Mrs. Finch! It was enough to put one in a rage. I told Theodora at last, since she would have it, there was nothing in the woman but impudence."

John glanced over his book, and perceived that to Arthur there appeared profanation in the implied comparison of that flashy display of beauty with the pure, modest, tender loveliness, whose every blush and smile, as well as the little unwonted decorations assumed to honour his presence, showed that its only value was the pleasure it gave to him. His last speech made her tone somewhat of reproof. "Oh!

that must have vexed her, I am afraid. She is very fond of Mrs. Finch."

"Out of opposition," said Arthur. "It is too bad, I declare! That Georgina was well enough as a girl, spirited and like Theodora, only Theodora always had sense. She was amusing then, but there is nothing so detestable as a woman who continues *fast* after marriage."

"Except a man," observed John, in a tone of soliloquy.

"She has grown so thin, too!" continued Arthur. "She used to be tolerably handsome when she was a fine plump rosy girl. Now she is all red cheek-bone and long neck! We are come to a pretty pass when we take her for a beauty!"

"Oh! but there is your sister," said Violet. "Do tell me how she likes going out. She thought it would be such a penance."

"All I know is, that at home she is as sulky as a Greenland bear, and then goes out and flirts nineteen to the dozen."

"Arthur!" came the remonstrating voice again, "how you talk — do you mean that she is silent at home? Is she unhappy? What can be the matter with her?"

"How should I know?"

"Has not she said anything about baby?"

"Not she. Not one of them has, except my father."

"I thought she would have liked to have heard of baby," said Violet, in a tone of disappointment; "but if there is anything on her spirits, perhaps she cannot think about him. I wonder what it can be. It cannot be any — any —"

"Any love affair! No! no! Miss Martindale may break hearts enough, but she will take care of her own, if she has one."

"Is she so much admired?"

"Of course she is. You do not often see her style, and she talks and goes on at no end of a rate."

"I remember how she grew excited at the ball, after disliking the prospect."

"Is this mere general admiration?" asked John, "or anything more serious?"

"Upon my word, I cannot say. There is no earnest on *her* part. She will rattle on with a poor fellow one night as if she had eyes for no one else, then leave him in the lurch the next. She cares not a rush for any of them, only wants to be run after. As to her followers, some of them are really smitten, I fancy. There was Fitzhugh, but he is an old hand, and can pay her in her own coin, and that sober-paced young Mervyn — it is a bad case with him. In fact, there is a fresh one whenever she goes out — a Jenny Dennison in high life — but the most bitten of all, I take it, is Lord St. Erme."

"Lord St. Erme!" exclaimed both auditors in a breath.

"Ay. She met him at that breakfast, walked about the gardens with him all the morning, and my mother wrote to my aunt, I believe, that she was booked. Then at this Bryanstone *soirée*, the next night, Fitzhugh was in the ascendant — poor St. Erme could not so much as gain a look."

"So he is in London!" said Violet. "Do tell me what he is like."

"Like a German music-master," said Arthur. "As queer a figure as ever I saw. Keeps his hair parted in the middle, hanging down in long lank rats' tails, meant to curl, mustache ditto, open collar turned down, black ribbon tie."

"Oh! how amazed the Wrangerton people would be!"

"It is too much to study the picturesque in one's own person in England!" said John, laughing. "I am sorry he continues that fashion."

"So, of course," continued Arthur, "all the young ladies are raving after him, while he goes mooning after Theodora. How the fair sex must solace itself with abusing 'that Miss Martindale!'"

"I wish he would be a little more sensible," said John. "He really is capable of something better."

"Where did you know him?"

"At Naples. I liked him very much till he persecuted me beyond endurance with Tennyson and Browning. He is always going about in raptures with some new-fashioned poet."

"I suppose he will set up Theodora for his muse. My mother is enchanted; he is exactly one of her own set, music, pictures, and all. The second-hand courtship is a fine chance for her when Miss Martindale is ungracious."

"But it will not come to anything," said John.

"In the meantime, her ladyship gets the benefit of a lion, and a very tawny lion, for her *soirées*."

"Oh! that *soirée* will be something pleasant for you," said Violet.

"I shall cut it. It is the first day I can be here."

"Not meet that great African traveller?"

"What good would Baron Münchhausen himself do me in the crowd my mother is heaping together?"

"I am sure your mother and sister must want you."

"Want must be their master. I am not going to elbow myself about and be squashed flat for their pleasure. It is a dozen times worse to be in a mob at home, for one has to find chairs for all the ladies. Pah!"

"That is very lazy!" said the wife. "You will be sorry to have missed it when it is too late, and your home people will be vexed."

"Who cares? My father does not, and the others take no pains not to vex us."

"O, Arthur! you know it makes it worse if you always come to me when they want you. I could wait very well. Only one day above all you must come," said she, with lowered voice, in his ear.

"What 's that?"

John could not see how, instead of speaking, she guided her husband's hand to her wedding-ring. His reply transpired — "I 'll not fail. Which day is it?"

"Friday week. I hope you will be able!"

"I 'll manage it. Why, it will be your birthday, too!"

"Yes, I shall be so glad to be seventeen. I shall feel as if baby would respect me more. Oh! I am glad you can come, but you must be good, and go to the *soirée*. I do think it would not be right always to leave them when they want you. Tell him so, please, Mr. Martindale."

John did so, but Arthur made no promises, and even when the day came, they were uncertain whether they might think of him at the party, or as smoking cigars at home.

CHAPTER V.

Her scourge is felt, unseen, unheard,
Where, though aloud the laughter swells,
Her secret in the bosom dwells,
There is a sadness in the strain
As from a heart o'ercharged with pain.
The Baptistery.

THEODORA had come to London, hating the idea of gaieties, liking nothing but the early service and chemical lectures, and shrinking from the meeting with her former friend. She enjoyed only the prospect of the comfort her society would afford her brother, depressed by attendance on a nervous wife, in an unsatisfactory home.

No Arthur met them at the station; he had left a message that he was taking Mrs. Martindale to the Isle of Wight, and should return early on Tuesday.

Theodora stayed at home the whole of that day, but in vain. She was busied in sending out cards to canvass for her dumb boy's admission into an asylum, when a message came up to her sitting-room. She started. Was it Arthur? No; Mrs. Finch was in the drawing-room; and at that moment a light step was on the stairs, and a flutter of gay ribbons advanced. "Ha, Theodora! I knew how to track you. The old place! Dear old school-room, how happy we have been here! Not gone out? Any one would think you had some stern female to shut you up with a tough exercise! But I believe you always broke out."

"I stayed in to-day, expecting my brother."

"Captain Martindale? Why, did not I see him riding with your father? Surely I did."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Theodora.

"Yes, but I did though; I am sure of it, for he bowed. He had that sweet pretty little mare of his. Have you seen her, Theodora? I quite envy her; but I suppose he bought it for his wife; and she deserves all that is sweet and pretty, I am sure, and has it, too."

Theodora could not recover from the thrill of pain so as to speak, and Mrs. Finch rattled on. "She was not in good looks when I saw her, poor thing, but she looked so soft and fragile, it quite went to my heart; though Jane will have it she is deep, and gets her own way by being meek and helpless. I don't go along with Jane throughout; I hate seeing holes picked in everybody."

"Where is Jane?"

"Gone to some charity sermonizing. She will meet some great folks there, and be in her element. I am glad to have you alone. Why, you bonny old Greek empress, you are as jolly a gipsy queen as ever! How you will turn people's heads! I am glad you have all that bright red brown on your cheeks!"

"No self-preservation like a country life and early rising," said Theodora, laughing. "You have not kept yourself as well, Georgina. I am sorry to see you so thin."

"Me! Oh, I have battered through more seasons than you have dreamt of!" said Mrs. Finch, lightly, but with a sigh. "And had a fever besides, which disposed of all my fat. I am like a hunter in fine condition, no superfluous flesh, ready for action. And as to action — what are you doing, Theodora? — where are you going?"

"I don't know. Mamma keeps the cards. I don't want to know anything about it."

Georgina burst into a laugh, rather unnecessarily loud.

"Just like you? Treat it as you used your music! What can't be cured must be endured, you know. Well, you poor victim, are you going to execution to-night?"

"Not that I know of."

"Famous! Then I'll tell you what: there is going to be a lecture on Mesmerism to-night. Wonderful! Clairvoyante tells you everything, past, present, and to come! You'll detect all the impostures; won't it be fun? I'll call for you at eight precisely."

Theodora thought of Arthur, and that she should miss the tidings of his child; then recollected that he had not afforded her one minute's greeting. She would show him that she did not care, and, therefore, made the agreement.

Cold and moody she came down to dinner, but her heart was beating with disappointment at not seeing Arthur, though a place was prepared for him. Mrs. Finch was right; he had been with his father all the afternoon, but had not supposed the ladies to be at home; an explanation which never occurred to Theodora.

He came in a few minutes after they had sat down; he was heated by his hasty walk from his empty house, and his greeting was brief and disconcerted at finding himself late. His mother made her composed inquiries for the party at Ventnor, without direct mention of the child, and he replied in the same tone. His cordial first intelligence had been bestowed upon his father, and he was not disposed to volunteer communications to the sister, whose apparent gloomy indifference mortified him.

He had not sat down ten minutes before word came that Mrs. Finch was waiting for Miss Martindale. Theodora rose, in the midst of her father's and brother's amazement. "I told mamma of my arrangement to go with Georgina Finch to a lecture on Mesmerism," she said.

"Mesmerism!" was the *sotto voce* exclamation of Lord Martindale. "But, my dear, you did not know that Arthur was at home this evening?"

"Yes, I did," said Theodora, coldly; mentally adding, "and I knew he had been five hours without coming near me."

"Who is going with you? Is Mr. Finch?"

"I have not heard. I cannot keep Georgina waiting."

It was no place for discussion. Lord Martindale only said —

"Arthur, cannot you go with your sister?"

Arthur muttered that "it would be a great bore, and he was as tired as a dog." He had no intention of going out of his way to oblige Theodora, while she showed no feeling for what concerned him most nearly; so he kept his place at the table, while Lord Martindale, displeased and perplexed, came out to say a few words to his daughter, under pretext of handing her to the carriage. "I am surprised, Theodora. It cannot be helped now, but your independent proceedings cannot go on here as at home."

Theodora vouchsafed no answer. The carriage contained only Mrs. Finch and Miss Gardner. Lord Martindale paused as his daughter stept in, gravely asking if they were going to take up Mr. Finch. Georgina's laugh was not quite what it would have been to a younger inquirer, but it did not tend to console him. "Mr. Finch! O no! We left him to the society of his port wine. I mean to test the clairvoyante by asking what he is dreaming about. But there is no fear of our coming to harm. Here's sister Jane for a duenna, and I always find squires wherever I go."

Lord Martindale sat at home much annoyed, and preparing a lecture for his wilful daughter on her return. Sooth to say, Theodora did not find any great reward in her expedition. The sight was a painful one; and her high principles had doubts whether it was a legitimate subject for encouragement. She longed all the time to be sitting by Arthur's side, and hearing of his little boy. How young and gay he looked to be a father and head of a family! and how satisfying it seemed to have his bright eyes in sight again! She looked so thoughtful that Georgina roused her by threatening to set the poor clairvoyante to read her meditations.

When Theodora came home, she would have gone straight up to her own room, but her father waylaid her, and the first

sound of his voice awoke the resolution to defend her freedom of action. Perhaps the perception that he was a little afraid of the rebuke he was about to administer added defiance to her determination.

"Theodora, I wish to speak to you. I do not wish to restrain your reasonable freedom, but I must beg that another time you will not fix your plans without some reference."

"I told mamma," she answered.

"I am not satisfied with the subject you have chosen — and I do not quite like what I see of Mrs. Finch. I had rather you made no engagements for the present."

"I will take care," said Theodora; "but when mamma does not go out, I must have some one. I will do nothing worthy of disapproval. Good night."

She walked off, leaving Lord Martindale baffled.

That evening seemed to give its colour to the subsequent weeks. It was a time of much pain to Theodora, estranging herself from her brother, fancying him prejudiced against her, and shutting herself up from her true pleasures to throw herself into what had little charm for her beyond the gratification of her self-will.

She really loved Georgina Finch. There was the bond of old association and girlish friendship, and this could not be set aside, even though the pair had grown far asunder. Perhaps the strongest link had been their likeness in strength of expression and disregard of opinion; but it now seemed as if what in Theodora was vehemence and determination, was in Georgina only exaggeration and recklessness. However, Georgina had a true affection for Theodora, and looked up to her genuine goodness, though without much attempt to imitate it, and the positive enthusiasm she possessed for her friend was very winning to one who was always pining for affection. Therefore Theodora adhered to her intimacy through all the evidences of disapproval, and always carried the day.

Georgina was well-born, and her sphere was naturally in the higher circles; and though her marriage had been beneath

her own rank, this was little thought of, as she was rich, and by many considered very handsome, fashionable, and agreeable. Mr. Finch was hardly ever seen, and little regarded when he was; he was a quiet, good-natured old man, who knew nothing but of money matters, and was proud of his gay young wife. She had her own way, and was much admired; sure to be in every party, and certain to be surrounded with gentlemen, to whom she rattled away with lively nonsense, and all of whom were ready to be her obedient squires. Her manners were impetuous, and, as well as her appearance, best to be described as dashing. Some people disliked her extremely; but she was always doing good-natured generous things, and the worst that could be said of her was, that she was careless of appearances, and, as Arthur called her, "fast." Theodora knew there was sincerity and warmth of heart, and was always trusting that these might develope into further excellences; moreover, she was sensible of having some influence for good. More than one wild freak had been relinquished on her remonstrance; and there was enough to justify her, in her own eyes, for continuing Georgina's firm friend and champion.

She had no other friendships; she did not like young ladies, and was still less liked by them; and Jane Gardner was nobody when her sister was by, though now and then her power was felt in double-edged sayings which recurred to mind.

However, Theodora found society more intoxicating than she had expected. Not that her sober sense enjoyed or approved; but in her own county she was used to be the undeniable princess of her circle, and she could not go out without trying to stand first still, and to let her attractions accomplish what her situation effected at home. Her princely deportment, striking countenance, and half-repelling, half-inviting manner, were more effective than the more regular beauty of other girls; for there was something irresistible in the privilege of obtaining a bright look and smile from

one whose demeanour was in general so distant; and when she once began to talk, eager, decided, brilliant, original, and bestowing exclusive and flattering attention, for the time, on the favoured individual, no marvel that he was bewitched, and when, the next night, she was haughty and regardless, he only watched the more ardently for a renewal of her smiles. The general homage was no pleasure to her; she took it as her due, and could not have borne to be without it. She had rather been at home with her books, or preparing lessons to send to her school at Brogden; but in company she could not bear not to reign supreme, and put forth every power to maintain her place, though in her grand, careless, indifferent manner, and when it was over, hating and despising her very success.

Arthur had thawed after his second visit to Ventnor; he had brought away too much satisfaction and good humour to be pervious to her moody looks; and his freedom and ease had a corresponding effect upon her. They became more like their usual selves towards each other; and when he yielded, on being again exhorted to stay for the *soirée*, she deemed it a loosening of the trammels in which he was held. He became available when she wanted him; and avoiding all mention of his family, they were very comfortable until Theodora was inspired with a desire to go to a last appearance of Mademoiselle Rachel, unfortunately on the very evening when Violet had especially begged him to be with her.

If he would have said it was his wedding-day, there could have been no debate; but he was subject to a sort of schoolboy reserve, where he was conscious or ashamed. And there were unpleasant reminiscences connected with that day — that unacknowledged sense of having been entrapped — that impossibility of forgetting his sister's expostulation — that disgust at being conspicuous — that longing for an excuse for flying into a passion — that universal hatred of everything belonging to the Mosses. He could not give a sentimental reason, and rather than let it be conjectured, he adduced

every pretext but the true one; professed to hate plays, especially tragedies, and scolded his sister for setting her heart on a French Jewess when there were plenty of English Christians.

"If you would only give me your true reason, I should be satisfied," said she, at last.

"I love my love with a V," was his answer, in so bright a tone, as should surely have appeased her; but far from it, she exclaimed,

"Ventnor! Why, will no other time do for *that?*"

"I have promised," Arthur answered, vexed at her tone.

"What possible difference can it make to her which day you go?"

"I have said."

"Come, write and tell her it is important to me. Rachel will not appear again, and papa is engaged. She must see the sense of it. Come, write."

"Too much trouble."

"Then I will; I shall say you gave me leave."

"Indeed," said Arthur, fully roused, "you will say no such thing. You have not shown so much attention to Mrs. Martindale, that you need expect her to give way to your convenience."

He walked away, as he always did when he thought he had provoked a female tongue. She was greatly mortified at having allowed her eagerness to lower her into offering to ask a favour of that wife of his; who, no doubt, had insisted on his coming, after having once failed, and could treat him to plenty of nervous and hysterical scenes.

Him Theodora pitied and forgave!

But by and by her feelings were further excited. She went with her mother to give orders at Storr and Mortimer's, on the setting of some jewels which her aunt had given her, and there encountered Arthur in the act of selecting a blue enamel locket, with a diamond fly perched on it. At the *soirée* she had heard him point out to Emma Brandon a similar one, on a velvet round a lady's neck, and say that it

would look well on Violet's white skin. So he was obliged to propitiate his idol with trinkets far more expensive than he could properly afford!

Theodora little guessed that the gift was received without one thought of the white throat, but with many speculations whether little Johnnie would soon be able to spare a bit of flaxen down to contrast with the black lock cut from his papa's head.

There was nothing for it but to dwell no more on this deluded brother, and Theodora tried every means to stifle the thought. She threw herself into the full whirl of society, rattling on in a way that nothing but high health and great bodily strength could have endured. After her discontented and ungracious commencement, she positively alarmed her parents by the quantity she undertook, with spirits apparently never flagging, though never did she lose that aching void. Books, lectures, conversation, dancing, could not banish that craving for her brother; nothing but the three hours of sleep that she allowed herself. If she exceeded them, there were unfailing dreams of Arthur and his child.

She thought of another cure. There was another kind of affection, not half so valuable in her eyes as paternal love; it made fools of people, but then they were happy in their blindness, and could keep it to themselves. She would condescend to lay herself open to the infection. It would be satisfying if she could catch it. She examined each of her followers in turn, but each fell short of her standard, and was repelled just as his hopes had been excited. One "Hollo, Theodora, come along," would have been worth all the court paid to her by men, to some of whom Arthur could have ill borne a comparison.

CHAPTER VI.

Thy precious things, whate'er they be
That haunt and vex thee, heart and brain,
Look to the Cross, and thou shalt see
How thou mayst turn them all to gain.
Christian Year.

All went well and smoothly at Ventnor, until a sudden and severe attack of some baby ailment threatened to render fruitless all Mr. Martindale's kind cares.

Violet's misery was extreme, though silent and unobtrusive; and John was surprised to find how much he shared it, and how strong his own personal affection had become for his little nephew; how many hopes he had built on him as the point of interest for his future life; the circumstances also of the baptism giving him a tenderness for him, almost a right in him such as he could feel in no other child.

Their anxiety did not last long enough for Arthur to be sent for; a favourable change soon revived the mother's hopes; and the doctor, on coming downstairs after his evening's visit, told John that the child was out of danger for the present; but added that he feared there were many more such trials in store for poor Mrs. Martindale; he thought the infant unusually delicate, and feared that it would hardly struggle through the first year.

John was much shocked, and sat in the solitary drawing-room, thinking over the disappointment and loss, severely felt for his own sake, and far more for the poor young mother, threatened with so grievous a trial at an age when sorrow is usually scarcely known, and when she had well nigh sunk under the ordinary wear and tear of married life. She had been so utterly cast down and wretched at the sight of the child's suffering, that it was fearful to imagine what it would be when there would be no recovery.

"Yes!" he mused with himself; "Violet has energy, conscientiousness, high principle to act, but she does not know how to apply the same principle to enable her to

endure. She knows religion as a guide, not as a comfort. She had not grown up to it, poor thing, before her need came. She wants her mother, and knows not where to rest in her griefs. Helen, my Helen, how you would have loved and cherished her, and led her to your own precious secret of patience and peace! What is to be done for her? Arthur cannot help her; Theodora will not, if she could; she is left to me. And can I take Helen's work on myself, and try to lead our poor young sister to what alone can support her? I must try — mere humanity demands it. Yes, Helen, you would tell me I have lived within myself too long. I can only dare to speak through your example. I will strive to overcome my reluctance to utter your dear name."

He was interrupted by Violet coming down to make tea. She was now happy; congratulating herself on the rapid improvement in the course of the day, and rejoicing that John and the doctor had dissuaded her from sending at once for Arthur.

"You were quite right," she said, "and I am glad now he was not here. I am afraid I was very fretful; but oh! you don't know what it is to see a baby so ill."

"Poor little boy —" John would have said more, but she went on, with tearful eyes and agitated voice.

"It does seem very hard that such a little innocent darling should suffer. He is not three months old, and his poor little life has been almost all pain and grief to him. I know it is wrong of me, but I cannot bear it! If it is for my fault, why cannot it be myself? It almost makes me angry."

"It does seem more than we can understand," said John, mournfully; "but we are told, 'What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.'"

"When all the other young things — lambs, and birds, and all — are so happy, and rejoicing in the sunshine!" continued Violet; "and children too!" as some gay young voices floated in on the summer air, and brought the tears in a shower.

"Don't grudge it to them, dear Violet," said John, in

his gentlest tone; "my dear little godson is more blessed in his gift. It seems to accord with what was in my mind when we took him to church. I do not know whether it was from my hardly ever having been at a christening before, or whether it was the poor little fellow's distressing crying; but the signing him with the cross especially struck me, the token of suffering even to this lamb. The next moment I saw the fitness — the cross given to him to turn the legacy of pain to the honour of partaking of the Passion — how much more for an innocent who has no penalty of his own to bear!"

"I have read things like that, but — I know I am talking wrongly — it always seems hard and stern to tell one not to grieve. You think it very bad in me to say so; but, indeed, I never knew how one *must* care for a baby."

"No, indeed, there is no blaming you; but what would comfort you would be to think of the Hand that is laid on him in love, for his highest good."

"But he wants no good done to him," cried Violet. "He has been good and sinless from the time before even his father or I saw him, when you —"

"We cannot tell what he may need. We are sure all he undergoes is sent by One who loves him better than even you do, who may be disciplining him for future life, or fitting him for brighter glory, and certainly giving him a share in the cross that has saved him."

His gentle tones had calmed her, and she sat listening as if she wished him to say more. "Do you remember," he added, "that picture you described to me this time last year, the Ghirlandajo's Madonna?"

"Oh, yes," said Violet, pleased and surprised.

"She does not hold her son back from the cross, does she, though the sword was to pierce through her own heart?"

"Yes; but that was for the greatest reason."

"Indeed, it was; but He who was a Child, the first-born Son of His mother, does not afflict your baby without cause.

He has laid on him as much of His cross as he can bear; and if it be yours also, you know that it is blessed to you both, and will turn to glory."

"The cross!" said Violet; adding, after some thought, "Perhaps thinking of that might make one bear one's own troubles better."

"The most patient person I ever knew found it so," said John; and with some hesitation and effort, "You know about her?"

"A little," she timidly replied; and the tears flowed again as she said, "I have been so very sorry for you."

"Thank you," he answered, in a suppressed tone of grateful emotion, for never was sympathy more refreshing to one who had long mourned in loneliness.

Eager, though almost alarmed, at being thus introduced to the melancholy romance of his history, Violet thought he waited for her to speak. "It was dreadful," she said; "it was so cruel, to sacrifice her to those old people."

"Was it cruel? Was it wrong?" said John, almost to himself. "I hope not. I do not think I could have decided otherwise."

"Oh, have I said anything wrong? I don't properly know about it. I fancied Arthur told me — I beg your pardon."

"I do not think Arthur knew the circumstances; they have never been much talked of. I do not know whether you would care to listen to a long story; but I should like you, as far as may be, to understand her, and consider her as your sister, who would have been very fond of you."

"And do you like to talk of it?"

"That I do, now," said John; her delicate, respectful sympathy so opening his heart, that what had been an effort became a relief.

"I should be so glad. Baby is asleep, and I came down to stay with you. It is very kind of you."

"You are very kind to listen," said John. "I must go a long way back, to the time when I lost my little sisters."

"Had you any more sisters?" said Violet, startled.

"Two; Anna, and another Theodora. They died at four and two years old, within two days of each other, while my father and mother were abroad with my aunt."

"What was their illness, poor little things?" anxiously asked Violet.

"I never knew. We all of us have, more or less, a West Indian constitution, that accounts for anything."

"How old were you? Do you remember them?"

"I was five. I have no distinct recollection of them, though I was very fond of Anna, and well remember the dreariness afterwards. Indeed, I moped and pined so much, that it was thought that to give me young companions was the only chance for me; and the little Fotheringhams were sent for from the parsonage to play with me."

"And it really began then?"

"Yes," said John, more cheerfully. "She was exactly of my own age, but with all the motherly helpful kindness of an elder sister, and full of pretty, childish compassion for the little wretched solitary being that I was. Her guarding me from the stout riotous Percy — a couple of years younger — was the first bond of union; and I fancy the nurses called her my little wife; I know I believed it then, and ever after. We were a great deal together. I never was so happy as with them; and as I was a frail subject at the best, and Arthur was not born till I was nine years old, I was too great a treasure to be contradicted. The parsonage was the great balance to the home spoiling; Mr. and Mrs. Fotheringham were most kind and judicious; and Helen's character could not but tell on all around."

"Was she grave?"

"Very merry, full of fun, but with a thoughtful staidness in her highest spirits, even as a girl. I saw no change when we met again" — after a pause: "No, I cannot describe her. When we go home you shall see her picture. No one ever reminded me of her as you do, though it is not flattering you to say so. If the baby had been a girl, I think I should have

asked you to call it by your second name. Well, we seldom spent a day without meeting, even after I had a tutor. The beginning of our troubles was her fifteenth birthday, the 10th of July. I had saved up my money, and bought a coral cross and a chain for her; but Mrs. Fotheringham would not let her keep it; she said it was too costly for me to give to any one but my sister. She tried to treat it lightly; hut I was old enough to perceive her reason; and I can feel the tingling in all my veins as I vowed with myself to keep it till I should have a right to offer it."

"What did she do?"

"I cannot tell; we did not wish to renew the subject. The worst of it was, that my aunt, who hears everything, found this out. She interrogated me, and wanted me to give it to Theodora, a mere baby. I felt as if I was defending Helen's possession, and refused to give it up unless at my father's command."

"I hope he did not order you."

"He never said a word to me. But our comfort was over; suspicion was excited; and I am afraid my aunt worried Mrs. Fotheringham. Nothing was said, but there was a check upon us. I was sent to a tutor at a distance; and when I was at home, either she went out on long visits in the holidays, or there was a surveillance on me; and when I did get down to the parsonage it was all formality. She took to calling me Mr. Martindale (by the bye, Violet, I wish you would not), was shy, and shrank from me."

"Oh! that was the worst," cried Violet. "Did not she care?"

"I believe her mother told her we were too old to go on as before. They were all quite right; and I can now see it was very good for me. When Mr. Fotheringham died, and they were about to leave the parish, I spoke to my father. He had the highest esteem for them all, was fond of her, knew they had behaved admirably. I verily believe he would have consented at once — nay, he had half done so, but —"

"Mrs. Nesbit, I am sure," exclaimed Violet.

"He was persuaded to think I had not had time to know my own mind, and ought not to engage myself till I had seen more of the world."

"How old were you?"

"Nineteen."

"Nineteen! If you did not know your own mind then, when could you?"

John smiled, and replied, "It was better to have such a motive. My position was one of temptation, and this was a safeguard as well as a check on idle prosperity. An incentive to exertion, too; for my father held out a hope that if I continued in the same mind, and deserved his confidence, he would consent in a few years, but on condition I should neither say nor do anything to show my feelings."

"Then you never told her?"

"No."

"I should not have liked that at all! But she must have guessed."

"She went with her mother to live in Lancashire, with old Mr. and Mrs. Percival, at Elsdale. There she lost her mother."

"How long did it go on before Lord Martindale consented?" asked Violet, breathlessly.

"Five years, but at last he was most kind. He *did* fully appreciate her. I went to Elsdale" — and he paused. "For a little while it was more than I can well bear to remember."

"You gave her the cross?" said Violet, presently.

"On her next birth-day. Well, then came considerations. Old Mrs. Percival was nearly blind, and could hardly move from her chair, the grandfather was very infirm, and becoming imbecile. His mind had never been clear since his daughter's death, and he always took Helen for her. She was everything to them."

"And they would not spare her?"

"She asked me what was to be done. She put it entirely

in my hands, saying she did not know where her duty lay, and she would abide by my decision."

"Then it was you! I can't think how you could."

"I trust it was not wrong. So asked, I could not say she ought to leave those poor old people to their helplessness for my sake, and I could not have come to live with them, for it was when I was in Parliament, and there were other reasons. We agreed, then, that she should not leave them in her grandfather's life-time, and that afterwards Mrs. Percival should come to our home, Brogden, as we thought it would be. Indeed, Violet, it was a piteous thing to hear that good venerable old lady entreating my pardon for letting Helen devote herself, saying, she would never have permitted it but for Mr. Percival, for what would become of him without his granddaughter — hoping they would not long stand in our way, and promising us the blessing that Helen enjoys. We could not regret our decision, and to be allowed to stand on such terms with each other was happiness enough then; yet all the time I had a presentiment that I was giving her up for ever, though I thought it would be the other way; the more when the next year I had the illness that has made me good for nothing ever since. That made it much easier to me, for I should have led her such a life of nursing and anxiety as I would not inflict on any woman."

"Surely she had the anxiety all the same?"

"There is a good deal spared by not being on the spot."

How can he think so? said Violet to herself. I can't imagine how she lived as long as she did. "Did you not see her at all when you were ill?" she said.

"Yes, we had one great treat that winter when I was at the worst. It was one of my father's especial pieces of kindness; he wrote to her himself, and sent Simmonds to fetch her to Martindale."

"And were you able to enjoy having her?"

"It was inflammation on the chest, so all my senses were free. She used to sit by me with her sober face, at work, ready to read and talk to me, and left sayings and thoughts

that have brought refreshment at every such time. It was indeed a blessing that she could come that first time to teach me how to bear illness."

"How long did she stay?"

"Only three weeks, for her absence only showed how little she could be spared; but she left an influence on that room of mine that it has never lost."

"How solitary it must have been when you were recovering."

"I had her letters. I will show you some of them some day. She used to write almost daily."

"And it was when you were getting better that you took the great journey in the East?"

"Yes; Percy had just left Cambridge, and was ready to take the care of me on his hands. Those two years went pleasantly by, and what a happy visit it was at Elsdale afterwards! You can't think how this talking over our travels has brought it back. As long as Mrs. Percival lived we did pretty well. She made Helen take care of herself, and I could go and stay there; but after her death the poor old man grew more childish and exacting. I once tried staying at the curate's, but it did not answer. He could not bear to have her out of his sight, and had taken an unhappy aversion to me, fancying me some old admirer of his own daughter, and always warning her against me."

"How distressing! How wretched! It would have killed me long before! How did she bear it? I know it was patiently, but I cannot understand it!"

"Her letters will best show you. It was the perfect trust that it was good for us; but what she underwent in those last three years we never knew. Her brother was at Constantinople. I could not go to Elsdale, and there was no one to interfere. We could not guess from her cheerful letters how she was wearing herself out, bearing his caprices, giving up sleep and exercise. I knew how it would be the first moment I met her, when I went to Elsdale to the funeral; but it was supposed to be only over-fatigue, and her aunt, Lady Fo-

theringham, took her home to recover. She grew worse, and went to London for advice. There I met her, and — and there she herself told me she had disease of the heart, and could not live a year."

Violet gave a sort of sob.

"She held up to me that cross — that first gift — she bade me think of the subjection of wills and affections it betokened. Little had we once thought of that meaning!"

"And then?" asked Violet, with face flushed and hands clasped.

"Lady Fotheringham took her to Worthbourne."

"Could you be with her?"

"Yes. One of the especial subjects of thankfulness was that I was well enough to stay with her. She was perfectly happy and contented, chiefly concerned to soften it to me. It was as if she had finished her work, and was free to enjoy as she sank into full repose, sunsets, hoar frosts, spring blossoms, the having me with her, her brother's return — everything was a pleasure. I can hardly call it a time of grief, when she was so placid and happy. All the wishing and scheming was over, and each day that I could look at her in her serenity, was only too precious."

"Was there much suffering?"

"At times there was, but in general there was only languor. She used to lie by the window, looking so smiling and tranquil that it was hard to believe how much she had gone through; and so peaceful, that we could not dare to wish to bring her back to care and turmoil. The last time she was able to talk to me, she showed me the cross still round her neck, and said she should like to think it would be as much comfort to any one else as it had been to her. I did not see her again till I was called in for her last look on anything earthly, when the suffering was passed and there was peaceful sinking."

Violet was crying too much for words, until at last she managed to say, "How could you — what could you do?"

"My illness was the best thing that could happen to me."

"How sorry you must have been to get well."
He replied,

"Her wings were grown,
To heaven she's flown,
'Cause I had none I'm left.

"Those lines haunted me when I found myself reviving to the weary useless life I spend here."

"O how can you call it so?" cried Violet. "How could Arthur and I do without you?"

There was a sound upstairs, and she started to the door, ran up, but came down in a few moments. "He is awake and better," she said. "I cannot come down again, for Sarah must go to supper. Good night, thank you for what you have told me;" then, with an earnest look, "only I can't bear you to say your life is useless. You don't know how we look to you."

"Thank you for your kind listening," he answered. "It has done me a great deal of good; but do not stay," as he saw her evidently longing to return to her child, yet lingering in the fear of unkindness to him. "I am glad he is better; you and he must both have a good night."

John was indeed refreshed by the evening's conversation. It had disclosed to him a new source of comfort, for hitherto his grief had never known the relief of sympathy. His whole soul had been fixed on one object from his boyhood; the hopes of deserving Helen had been his incentive to exertion in his youth, and when disabled by sickness, he had always looked forward to a new commencement of active usefulness with her. It had been a life of waiting; patient, but without present action, and completely wrapt up in a single attachment and hope. When that was taken from him he had not failed in faith and submission, but he had nothing to occupy him or afford present solace and interest; he had no future, save lonely waiting still, until he should again rejoin her who had been his all on earth.

However, the effort made to reconcile his brother with the family had produced an unlooked-for influence, and en-

larged his sphere of interest. At first came languid amusement in contemplating the pretty young bride, then liking and compassion for her, then the great anxiety in her illness, and afterwards real affection and solicitude for her and her child had filled his mind and detached him from his own sorrows; and he now became sensible that he had indeed, while trying to serve her and his brother, done much for his own relief. What she said of their dependence on him was not only a pleasure to him; but it awoke him to the perception that he had not been so utterly debarred from usefulness as he had imagined, and that he had neglected much that might have infinitely benefited his brother, sister, and father. He had lived for himself and Helen alone!

He tried to draw out Helen's example to teach Violet to endure, and in doing so, the other side of the lesson came home to himself. Helen's life had been one of exertion as well as of submission. It had not been merely spent in saying, "Thy will be done," but in doing it; she had not merely stood still and uncomplaining beneath the cross, but she had borne it onward in the service of others.

CHAPTER VII.

Sweeter 't is to hearken
  Than to bear a part,
Better to look on happiness
  Than to carry a light heart,
Sweeter to walk on cloudy hills,
  With a sunny plain below,
Than to weary of the brightness
  Where the floods of sunshine flow.

ALFORD.

One morning John received a letter from Constantinople, which he had scarcely opened before he exclaimed, "Ha! what does he mean! Given up his appointment! Coming home! It is just like him. I must read you what he says, it is so characteristic."

"You must have been provoked at my leaving you all this time in doubt what to do with our precious Tour; but

the fact is, that I have been making a fool of myself, and as the Crusaders are the only cover my folly has from the world, I must make the most of them. I give out that my literary affairs require my presence; but you, as the means of putting me into my post, deserve an honest confession. About six weeks ago, my subordinate, Evans, fell sick, an estimable chicken-hearted fellow. In a weak moment, I not only took his work on my hands, but bored myself by nursing him, and thereby found it was a complaint only to be cured by my shoes."

"Shoes!" exclaimed Violet. John read on.

"It was a dismal story of an engagement to a clergyman's daughter; her father just dead, she reduced to go out as governess, and he having half nothing of his own, mending the matter by working himself into a low fever, and doing his best to rid her of all care on his account. Of course I rowed him well, but I soon found I had the infection — a bad fit of soft-heartedness came over me."

"Oh!" cried Violet, "he gives up for this poor man's sake."

"I thought all peace was over if I was to see poor Evans enacting the enamoured swain every day of my life, for the fellow had not the grace to carry it off like a man, besides having his business to do; or, if he should succeed in dying, I should not only be haunted by his ghost, but have to convey his last words to the disconsolate governess. So, on calculation, I thought trouble would be saved by giving notice that I was going home to publish the Crusaders, and sending him to fetch his bride, on whose arrival I shall bid a long farewell to the Grand Turk. I fancy I shall take an erratic course through Moldavia and some of those out of the way locations, so you need not write to me again here, nor think of me till you see me about the end of August. I suppose about that time Theodora will have finished the course of severe toil reserved for young ladies every spring, so I shall come straight home expecting to see you all."

"Home, does that mean Martindale?" said Violet.

"Yes. He has never looked on any place but Brogden as his home."

"You don't think he repents of what he has done?"

"No, certainly not. He has seen what a long engagement is."

"Yes; I almost wonder at his writing to you in that tone."

"He banters because he cannot bear to show his real feeling. I am not anxious about him. He has 300*l.* a-year of his own, and plenty of resources, — besides, the baronetcy must come to him. He can afford to do as he pleases."

"What a noble character he must be!" said Violet; "it is like a story! How old is he?"

"About nine-and-twenty. I am glad you should see him. He is a very amusing fellow."

"How clever he must be!"

"The cleverest man I know. I hope he will come soon. I should like to have a little time with him before my winter migration. We have not met since he was obliged to return, a fortnight after her death, when I little expected ever to see him again."

This prospect seemed to set John's mind more than ever on Helen, as if he wanted to talk over her brother's conduct with her, and was imagining her sentiments on it.

He spoke much of her in the day, and in the evening brought down a manuscript-book.

"I should like to read some of this to you," he said. "She had so few events in her life at Elsdale that her letters, written to occupy me when I was laid up, became almost a journal of her thoughts. I copied out some parts to carry about with me; and perhaps you would like to hear some of them."

"Indeed I should, thank you, if you ought to read aloud."

He turned over the pages, and seemed to be trying whether he could bear to read different passages, but gave

up one after another, and nearly half an hour had passed before he began.

"February 20. It was the winter after her coming to Martindale."

"This morning was a pattern one for February, and I went out before the brightness was passed, and had several turns in the walled garden. I am afraid you will never be able to understand the pleasantness of such a morning. Perhaps you will say the very description makes you shiver, but I must tell you how beautiful it was. The frost last night was not sharp, but just sufficient to detain the dew till the sun could turn it into diamonds. There was some so brilliant, glancing green or red in different lights, they were quite a study. It is pleasant to think that this pretty frost is not adorning the plants with unwholesome beauty, though the poor little green buds of currant and gooseberry don't like it, and the pairs of woodbine leaves turn in their edges. It is doing them good against their will, keeping them from spreading too soon. I fancied it like early troubles keeping baptismal dew fresh and bright; and those jewels of living light went on to connect themselves with the radiant coronets of some whom the world might call blighted in —"

It had brought on one of his severe fits of coughing. Violet was going to ring for Brown, but he stopped her by a sign, which he tried to make re-assuring. It was worse, and lasted longer than the former one, and exhausted him so much, that he had to rest on the sofa cushions before he could recover breath. At last, in a very low voice, he said, "There, it is of no use to try."

"I hope you are better; pray don't speak; only will you have anything?"

"No, thank you; lying still will set me to rights. It is only that these coughs leave a pain — nothing to mind."

He settled himself on the sofa, not without threatenings of a return of cough, and Violet arranged the cushions, concerned at his trying to thank her. After a silence, he began

to breathe more easily, and said, "Will you read me the rest of that?"

She gave him the book to find the place, and then read:

"The world might call them blighted in their early bloom, and deprived of all that life was bestowed for; but how different is the inner view, and how glorious the thought of the numbers of quiet, common-place sufferers in homely life, like my currant and gooseberry bushes, who have found their frost has preserved their dewdrops to be diamonds for ever. If this is too fanciful, don't read it, but I go rambling on as the notions come into my head, and if you only get a laugh at my dreamings, they will have been of some use to you."

"How beautiful!" said Violet; "how you must have liked receiving such letters!"

"Yes; the greatest blank in the day is post time."

He held out his hand for the book, and found another passage for her.

"I have been thinking how kindly that sentence is framed: 'Casting all your care on Him.' All, as if we might have been afraid to lay before Him our petty perplexities. It is the knowing we are cared for in detail, that is the comfort; and that when we have honestly done our best in little things our Father will bless them, and fill up our shortcomings.

"That dressmaker must have been a happy woman, who never took home her work without praying that it might fit. I always liked that story particularly, as it shows how the practical life in the most trivial round can be united with thus casting all our care upon Him — the being busy in our own station with choosing the good part. I suppose it is as a child may do its own work in a manufactory, not concerning itself for the rest; or a coral-worm make its own cell, not knowing what branches it is helping to form, or what an island it is raising. What a mercy that we have only to try to do right from moment to moment, and not meddle with the future!"

"Like herself," said John.

"I never thought of such things," said Violet. "I never thought little matters seemed worth treating in this way."

"Everything that is a duty or a grief must be worth it," said John. "Consider the worthlessness of what we think most important in That Presence. A kingdom less than an ant's nest in comparison. But, here, I must show you a more everyday bit. It was towards the end, when she hardly ever left her grandfather, and I had been writing to urge her to spare herself." Violet read —

"You need not be afraid, dear John; I am quite equal to all I have to do. Fatigue never knocks me up, which is a great blessing; and I can sleep anywhere at the shortest notice. Indeed, I don't know what should tire me, for there is not even any running up and down stairs; and as to spirits, you would not think them in danger if you heard how I talk parish matters to the curate, and gossip with the doctor, till grandpapa brightens, and I have to shout an abstract of the news into his ear. It is such a treat to bring that flash of intelligence on his face — and it has not been so rare lately; he seems now and then to follow one of the Psalms, as I read them to him at intervals through the day. Then for pastime, there is no want of that, with the two windows looking out different ways. I can't think how you could forget my two beautiful windows — one with a view of the back door for my dissipation, and the other with the garden, and the varieties of trees and the ever-changing clouds. I never look out without finding some entertainment; my last sight was a long-tailed titmouse, popping into the yew tree, and setting me to think of the ragged fir tree at Brogden, with you and Percy spying up, questioning whether golden-crest or long-tailed pye lived in the dome above. No, no; don't waste anxiety upon me. I am very happy, and have everything to be thankful for."

"'My mind to me a kingdom is,' she might have said," observed John.

"She might indeed. How beautiful! How ashamed it does make one of one's self!"

So they continued, he choosing passages, which she read aloud, till the evening was over, when he asked her whether she would like to look through the book?

"That I should, but you had rather I did not."

"Yes, I do wish you to read it, and to know Helen. There is nothing there is any objection to your seeing. I wrote them out partly for Percy's sake. Your reading these to me has been very pleasant."

"It has been so to me, I am sure. I do not know how to thank you; only I am grieved that you have hurt yourself. I hope you are better now."

"Yes, thank you; I shall be quite right in the morning."

His voice was, however, so weak, and he seemed so uncomfortable, that Violet was uneasy; and as Brown lighted her candle in the hall, she paused to consult him, and found that, though concerned, he did not apprehend any bad consequences, saying that these attacks were often brought on by a chill, or by any strong excitement; he had no doubt this was occasioned by hearing of Mr. Fotheringham's intended return; indeed he had thought Mr. Martindale looking flushed and excited all day.

Never did charge appear more precious than those extracts. She had an enthusiastic veneration for Helen, and there was a youthful, personal feeling for her, which made her apply the words and admire them far more than if they had been in print.

As she dwelt upon them, the perception grew on her, that not only was it a duty to strive for contentment, but that to look on all trials as crosses to be borne daily, was the only way to obtain it.

Helen's many homely trials and petty difficulties were what came to her chiefly as examples and encouragements, and she began to make resolutions on her own account.

Yet, one day, when Arthur was expected and did not come, she conjured up so many alarms, that it was well

that consideration for her companion obliged her to let him divert her mind.

The next day John led her to the beach, and set her to find rare sea-weeds for his mother. The charm of the pursuit, the curling tide, the occasional peeps at Johnnie as he was paraded, serene and sleepy, in Sarah's arms, made time speed so fast that she was taken by surprise when voices hailed them, and she beheld Arthur and his father.

No wedding-day being in the case, Arthur had gladly put off his coming on a proposal from his father to accompany him, see John's *menage*, and be introduced to his grandson.

Much more warmly than in former times did Lord Martindale greet his daughter-in-law, and quickly he asked for the baby. In spite of the doctor's prognostications, the little fellow had begun to mend, and he looked his best, nearly hidden in hood and mantle, and embellished by his mother's happy face, as she held him in her arms, rejoicing in the welcome bestowed on the first grandson.

Violet had never been so comfortable with Lord Martindale. There was the advantage of being the only lady, and he unbent more than he ever did at home. He had come partly to see what was to be the next arrangement. Five weeks of London had been almost too much for Lady Martindale, with whom it never agreed, and who had found a season with her unmanageable daughter very different from what it had formerly been, when her aunt arranged everything for her; and the family were about to return home. Arthur was to bring his wife to Martindale as soon as his leave began — but this would not be for a month; and his father, concerned to see her still so delicate, advised him not to think of her return to London in the hottest part of the year, and proposed to take her and the baby home with him. John, however, declared that he should prefer staying on at Ventnor with her; the place agreed with him, and he liked the quiet for finishing Percy Fotheringham's work; besides, it suited Arthur better to be able to come backwards

and forwards. The only doubt was whether she was tired of his dull company.

Arthur answered for her, and she was well satisfied, thinking it a great escape not to have to go to Martindale without him, but afraid John was giving up a great deal to her, when she must be a very tiresome companion; at which Arthur laughed, telling her of John's counter fears, and adding, that he had never seen his brother in such good spirits in all his life — he was now actually like other people.

Lord Martindale also feared that John found his undertaking wearisome, and talked it over with him, saying it was very kind of him, very good for Arthur's wife; but was she society enough? "Would he not like to have Theodora to relieve him of the charge, and be more of a companion?"

"Thank you," said John, "we shall be very glad to have Theodora, if she likes to come. It is a very good opportunity for them to grow intimate."

"I'll send her next time Arthur comes."

"But you must not think it an act of compassion, as if Violet was on my hands. She is a particularly agreeable person, and we do very well together. In fact, I have enjoyed this time very much; and Theodora must not think herself obliged to come for my sake, as if I wanted help."

"I understand," said his father; "and of course it will depend on what engagements they have made; but I should be very glad she should be more with you, and if she saw more of Arthur's wife, it might detach her from those friends of hers. I cannot think how it is Theodora is not disgusted with Mrs. Finch! It is a comfort, after all, that Arthur did not marry Miss Gardner!"

"A great one!"

"This girl has simplicity and gentleness at least, poor thing," continued Lord Martindale; "and I am quite of your opinion, John, that marriage has improved him greatly. I never saw him so free from nonsense. Strangely as it has come about, this may be the making of him. I only wish

I could see her and the poor child looking stronger. I will send your sister, by all means."

So Lord Martindale returned, and proposed the plan to his daughter. At first, she was flattered at being wanted, and graciously replied, "Poor John, he must want some variety."

"Not exactly that," said her father. "They are so comfortable together, it is a pleasure to see them. I should like to stay there myself, and it is a very agreeable scheme for you."

"I was considering my engagements," said Theodora. "Of course, if I am really wanted, everything must be put aside."

"John desired you would not think it an act of charity," said her father. "He says he finds her a most agreeable companion, and you need only look upon it as a pleasant scheme for all parties."

"Oh," said Theodora, in a different tone.

"He said you were not to put yourself out of the way. He would be very glad of your company, and it will be very good for you all to be together."

"Oh! then I don't think it is worth while for me to go," said Theodora. "I am much obliged to John, but I should only interfere with his course of education."

"Not go?" said her father.

"No, there is no occasion; and I wish to be at home as soon as I can."

"Well, my dear, you must decide your own way, but I thought you would be glad of the opportunity of being with John, and I should be glad, too, that you should see more of your sister. She is a very engaging person, and I am sure you would find her a more satisfactory companion than Mrs. Finch."

After this speech, Theodora would have suffered considerably rather than have gone. "They will soon be at Martindale," she said, "and I cannot stay longer away from the village."

"I wish at least that you would go down as I did for a day with Arthur. You would enjoy it, and it would give them all pleasure. Indeed, I think it would only be a proper piece of attention on your part."

She made no answer, but the next time Arthur was going, she instantly stopped all her father's arrangements for her accompanying him, by saying she was going to a lecture on electricity; then, when Lord Martindale began asking if Arthur could not change his day, she majestically said, "No, Arthur would not disappoint Mrs. Martindale on my account."

"If you would go, Theodora," said Arthur, eagerly, "Violet would not mind waiting. She would be specially pleased to show you the boy. It is very jolly there."

The first time he had spoken to her of his three months' old son. If she had not been in a dire fit of sullen jealousy, it would have softened as much as it thrilled her, but she had the notion that she was not wanted, except to do homage to the universally-petted Violet.

"I cannot spare a day."

So Arthur was vexed, and the frost was harder.

John had not much expected Theodora, and was more sorry for her sake than his own. The last month was still better than the first, the brother and sister understood each other more fully, and their confidence had become thoroughly confirmed. The baby had taken a start, as Sarah called it, left off unreasonable crying, sat up, laughed and stared about with a sharp look of inquiry in his dark eyes and tiny thin face, so ridiculously like his grandfather, Mr. Moss, that his mother could not help being diverted with the resemblance, except when she tormented herself with the fear that the likeness was unpleasing to Arthur, if perchance he remarked it; but he looked so little at the child, that she often feared he did not care for him personally, though he had a certain pride in him as son and heir.

Violet herself, though still delicate and requiring care, had recovered her looks and spirits, and much of her

strength, and John walked and conversed more than he had done for years, did not shrink from the society of the few families they were acquainted with, and seemed to have derived as much benefit from his kind scheme as the objects of it. In fact his hopes and affections were taking a fresh spring — the effects of his kindness to Arthur and Violet had shown him that he could be useful to others, and he thus discovered what he had missed in his indulged life, crossed in but one respect — he saw that he had set himself aside from family duties, as well as from the more active ones that his health prohibited, and with a feeling at once of regret and invigoration, he thought over the course that lay open to him, and soon began to form plans and discuss them with his ever ready listener. His foreign winters need no longer be useless, he proposed to go to Barbuda to look after his mother's estates — indeed, it seemed so obvious that when he once thought of it he could not imagine why it had never occurred to him before; it would save his father the voyage, and when he and Violet began to figure to themselves the good that could be done there, they grew animated and eager in their castles.

That month sped fast away, and their drives were now last visits to the places that had charmed them at first. Their work was prepared for Mr. Fotheringham's inspection, and Violet having copied out her favourite passages of Helen's book, returned it on the last evening. "I don't think I half understand all she says, though I do admire it so much, and wish I was like it."

"You will be, you are in the way."

"You don't know how foolish I am," said Violet, almost as if he was disrespectful to Helen.

"Helen was once seventeen," said John, smiling.

"Oh, but I have no patience. I fret and tease myself, and fancy all sorts of things, instead of trusting as she did. I don't know how to do so."

"I know how weakness brings swarming harassing

thoughts," said John; "it is well for us that there are so many external helps to patience and confidence."

"Ah! that is what shows how bad I am," said Violet, despondingly. "I never keep my mind in order at church, yet I am sure I was more unreasonably discontented when I was not able to go."

"Which shows it is of use to you. Think of it not only as a duty that must be fulfilled, but watch for refreshment from it, and you will find it come."

"Ah! I have missed all the great festivals this year. I have not stayed to the full service since I was at Rickworth, and what is worse, I do not dislike being prevented," said Violet, falteringly; as if she must say the words, "I don't like staying alone."

"You must conquer that," said John, earnestly. "That feeling must never keep you away. Your continuance is the best hope of bringing him; your leaving off would be fatal to you both. I should almost like you to promise never to keep away because he did."

"I think I can promise," said Violet, faintly. "It is only what mamma has always had to do; and, last Christmas, it did keep me away. I did think then he would have come; and when I found he did not — then I was really tired — but I know I could have stayed — but I made it an excuse, and went away." The tears began to flow. "I thought of it again when I was ill, and afterwards when I found out how nearly I had been dying; it was frightful. I said to myself, I would not miss again; but I have never had the opportunity since I have been well."

"It is monthly at home," said John. "Only try to look to it as a favour and a comfort, as I said about church-going, but in a still higher degree — not merely as a service required from you. Believe it is a refreshment, and in time you will find it the greatest."

"I 'll try," she said, in a low, melancholy voice; "but I never feel as good people do."

"You have had more than usual against you," said John;

"cares for which you were not prepared, and weakness to exaggerate them; but you will have had a long rest, and I hope may be more equal to the tasks of daily life."

They were interrupted by tea being brought; and the conversation continued in a less serious style.

"Our last tea-drinking," said John. Certainly, it has been very pleasant here."

"This island, that I thought so far away, and almost in foreign parts," said Violet, smiling; "I hope it has cured me of foolish terrors."

"You will bravely make up your mind to Martindale."

"I shall like to show Johnnie the peacock," said Violet, in a tone as if seeking for some pleasant anticipation.

John laughed, and said, "Poor Johnnie! I shall like to see him there in his inheritance."

"Dear little man! I hope his grandfather will think him grown. I am glad they did not see him while he was so tiny and miserable. I am sure they must like him now, he takes so much notice."

"You must not be disappointed if my mother does not make much of him," said John; "It was not her way with her own." Then, as Violet looked aghast, "You do not know my mother. It requires a good deal to show what she can be, beneath her distant manner, I never knew her till two years ago."

"When you were past thirty?" broke from Violet's lips, in a sort of horror.

"When I was most in need of comfort," he answered. "There has been a formality and constraint in our life that has not allowed the affections their natural play, but indeed they exist. There have been times when even I distrusted my mother's attachment; but she could not help it, and it was all the stronger afterwards. Madeira taught me what she is, away from my aunt."

"I do hope it is not wrong to feel about Mrs. Nesbit as I do! I am ready to run away from her. I know she is spying for my faults. Oh! I cannot like her."

"That is a very mild version of what I have felt," said John; "I believe she has done us all infinite harm. But I am hardly qualified to speak; for, from the time she gave up the hope of my being a credit to the family, she has disliked me, said cutting things, well nigh persecuted me. She did harass Helen to give me up; but, after all, poor woman, I believe I have been a great vexation to her, and I cannot help being sorry for her. It is a pitiable old age, straining to keep hold of what used to occupy her, and irritated at her own failing faculties."

"I will try to think of that," said Violet.

"I wonder what powers she will give me over her West Indian property; I must try," said John; "it will make a great difference to my opportunities of usefulness. I must talk to my father about it."

"How very kind Theodora is to poor little Miss Piper," said Violet.

"Yes; that is one of Theodora's best points."

"Oh! she is so very good; I wish she could endure me."

"So do I," said John. "I have neglected her, and now I reap the fruits. In that great house at home people live so much apart, that if they wish to meet, they must seek each other. And I never saw her as a child but when she came down in the evening, with her great black eyes looking so large and fierce. As a wild high-spirited girl I never made acquaintance with her, and now I cannot."

"But when you were ill this last time, did she not read to you, and nurse you?"

"That was not permitted; there might have been risk; and besides, as Arthur says, I only wished to be let alone. I had not then realized that sympathy accepted for the sake of the giver will turn to the good of the receiver. No; I have thrown her away as far as I am concerned; and when I see what noble character and religious feeling there is with that indomitable pride and temper, I am the more grieved. Helen walked with her twice or three times when she was at Martindale, and she told me how much there was in her, but

I never tried to develope it. I thought when Helen was her sister — but that chance is gone. That intractable spirit will never be tamed but by affection; but, unluckily, I don't know," said John, smiling, "who would marry Theodora."

"Oh! how can you say so? She is so like Arthur."

John laughed. "No, I give up the hope of a Petruchio."

"But Mr. Wingfield, I thought —"

"Wingfield!" said John, starting. "No, no, that 's not likely."

"Nor Lord St. Erme?"

"I hope not. He is fancy-bit, I suppose, but he is not her superior. Life with him would harden rather than tame her. No. After all, strangely as she has behaved about him, when she has him in sight, I suspect there is one person among us more likely to soften her than any other."

"Arthur?"

"Arthur's son."

"Oh! of course, and if she will but love my Johnnie, I don't much care about his mamma."

CHAPTER VIII.

In glowing health, with boundless wealth,
But sickening of a vague disease,
You know so ill to deal with time,
You needs must play such pranks as these.

TENNYSON.

In spite of herself, Theodora's heart bounded at the prospect of having Arthur's child in the house. She visited the babies in the village, and multiplying their charms by the superior beauty of Arthur and his wife, proportionably raised her expectations, but, of course, she betrayed none of her eagerness, and would not give up one iota of her course of village occupations for the sake of being at home for the arrival.

Nevertheless, she returned across the park, through burning sunshine, at double-quick pace, only slackened on seeing a carriage; but it proved to be her aunt, who

was being assisted out of it, and tottering up the steps with the help of Lady Martindale's arm, while Miss Piper coming down to give her assistance, informed them that the party had arrived about an hour before. The two gentlemen had gone out, and Mrs. Arthur Martindale was in her own room.

Trembling with eagerness, Theodora followed the tardy steps of her mother and aunt as they mounted the stairs. As they entered the gallery, a slender figure advanced to meet them, her apple blossom face all smiles, and carrying a thing like a middle-sized doll, if doll had ever been as bald, or as pinched, or as skinny, or flourished such spare arms, or clenched such claw-like fingers. Was this the best she could give Arthur by way of son and heir? Yet she looked as proud and exulting as if he had been the loveliest of children, and the little wretch himself had a pert, lively air of speculation, as if he partook her complacency.

Lady Martindale gave her stately greeting, and Mrs. Nesbit coldly touched her hand; then Theodora, with some difficulty pronounced the words, "How are you?" and brought herself to kiss Violet's cheek, but took no apparent notice of the child, and stood apart while her mother made all hospitable speeches, moving on, so as not to keep Mrs. Nesbit standing.

Theodora followed her aunt and mother, and as soon as the baize door was shut on them, Violet hugged her baby closely, whispering, "No welcome for the poor little boy! nobody cares for him but his own mamma! Never mind, my Johnnie, we are not too grand to love each other."

Theodora in the meantime could not help exclaiming, "Poor child! It is just like a changeling!"

"Don't talk of it, my dear," said Lady Martindale, with a shudder and look of suffering. "Poor little dear! He looks exactly as your poor little brother did!" and she left the room with a movement far unlike her usually slow dignified steps.

"Ah!" said her aunt, in a tone between grief and dis-

pleasure; "here 's a pretty business! we must keep him out of her way! Don't you ever bring him forward, Theodora, to revive all that."

"What is the meaning of it?" said Theodora. "I did not know I ever had another brother."

"It was long before your time, my dear, but your mamma has never entirely got over it, though he only lived nine weeks. I would not have had the recollection recalled on any account. And now John has brought this child here! If he was to die here I don't know what the effect on your mamma would be."

"He is not going to die!" said Theodora, hastily; "but let me hear of my other brother, aunt."

"There is nothing to hear, my dear," said Mrs. Nesbit. "How could the girl think of bringing him on us without preparation? An effect of John's spoiling her, of course. She expects him to be made much of; but she must be taught to perceive this is no house of which she can make all parts a nursery."

"Let me hear about my brother," repeated Theodora. "How old would he be? What was his name?"

"His name was Theodore. He never could have lived," said Mrs. Nesbit: "it was much as it was with this child of Arthur's. He was born unexpectedly at Vienna. Your mamma had a dreadful illness, brought on by your father's blundering sudden way of telling her of the death of poor little Dora and Anna. He has not a notion of self-command or concealment; so, instead of letting me prepare her, he allowed her to come home from the drive, and find him completely overcome."

Theodora better understood her mother's stifled sympathy for Violet, and her father's more openly shown feeling for Arthur.

"We were in great alarm for her," continued Mrs. Nesbit; "and the poor child was a miserable little thing, and pined away till we thought it best to send him home to be

under English treatment; and your father chose to go with him to see John, who was in a very unsatisfactory state."

"And mamma did not go?"

"She was unfit for the journey, and I remained with her. It was a fortunate arrangement of mine; for I knew he could not survive; and anxiety for him retarded her recovery, though we had hardly ever let her see him."

"Then he died? — how soon?"

"At Frankfort, a fortnight after we parted with him. It was a dreadful shock to her; and if it had happened in the house, I do not think she would ever have recovered it. Was it a fortnight? Yes, I know it was; for it was on the 3rd of September that I had your papa's letter. We were going to a party at Prince K—'s, where there was to be a celebrated Italian improvisatrice, and I would not give her the letter till the next morning."

Theodora stared at her in incredulous horror.

"It threw her back sadly; but I did my utmost to rally her spirits, and her health did not suffer so materially as I feared; but she has strong feelings, and the impression has never been entirely removed. She scarcely ventured to look at Arthur or at you. How could your papa have let this child come here?"

"Is he like poor little Theodore?" said the sister.

"Only as one wretched-looking baby is like another. This one is not a bit like the Martindales: it is exactly his mother's face."

"Is he buried here?"

"Who — Theodore? Yes; your papa came home, and managed matters his own way, sent off all the governesses, put John under that ignorant old nurse, and began the precious intimacy with the Fotheringhams, that led to such results. I could have told him how it would be; but I believe he did repent of that!"

"Did John know about Theodore?"

"No; his sister's death had such an effect on him that they kept the knowledge from him. You had better never

mention it, my dear; and especially," she added, somewhat pleadingly, "I would not have the party at the Prince's transpire to your papa."

Theodora felt her indignation would not endure concealment much longer. She called Miss Piper, and hastened away, the next moment finding herself *vis-à-vis* with John.

"Are you just come in?" said he, greeting her.

"No, I have been with my aunt. How are you now?"

"Quite well, thank you. I wish you could have come to Ventnor. You would have enjoyed it very much."

"Thank you."

"Have you seen Violet?"

"Yes, I have."

"And the little boy?"

"Yes."

"I can't say he is a beauty, but you who are such a baby fancier will find him a very animated, intelligent child. I hope all fear is over about him now; he has thriven wonderfully of late."

Perverseness prompted Theodora to say, "The baby at the lodge is twice the size."

John saw there was no use in talking, and shut himself into his room. The next instant Sarah appeared, with the baby on one arm, and a pile of clothes on the other.

No one was in sight, so Theodora could gratify her passionate yearnings for her brother's babe; justifying herself to her own pride, by considering it charity to an overloaded servant.

"Let me have him. Let me carry him up."

"Thank you, Ma'am, I 'll not fash you," said Sarah, stiffly.

"Let me! Oh! let me. I have often held a baby. Come to me, my precious. Don't you know your aunt, your papa's own sister? There, he smiled at me! He will come! You know me, you pretty one?"

She held him near the window, and gazed with almost devouring eyes.

"He will be handsome — he will be beautiful!" she said. "Oh! it is a shame to say you are not! You are like your papa — you are a thorough Martindale! That is your papa's bright eye, and the real Martindale brow, you sweet, little, fair, feeble, helpless thing! Oh! nurse, I can't spare him yet, and you have to unpack. Let me hold him. I know he likes me. Don't you love aunt Theodora, babe?"

Sarah let her keep him, mollified by her devotion to him, and relieved at having him off her hands in taking possession of the great, bare, scantily-furnished nursery. Theodora lamented over his delicate looks, and was told he would not be here now but for his mamma, and the Isle of Wight doctor, who had done him a power of good. She begged to hear of all his wants; rang the bell; and walked up and down the room, caressing him, until he grew fretful; and no one answering the bell, she rang again in displeasure. Sarah thanking her, and saying she wished to have him ready for bed before his mamma came up.

After her public reception, Theodora would not be caught nursing him in secret, so hastily saying she would send some one, she kissed the little blue-veined forehead, and rushing at full speed down the back stairs, she flew into the housekeeper's room; "Jenkins, there's no one attending to the nursery bell. I wish you would see to it. Send up some one with some hot water to Master Martindale directly."

As fast she ran back to her own room, ordered off Pauline to help Master Martindale's nurse, and flung herself into her chair, in a wild fit of passion.

"Improvisatrice! Prince's parties! this is what it is to be great, rich, horrid people, and live a heartless, artificial life! Even this silly, affected girl has the natural instincts of a mother; she nurses her sick child, it lies on her bosom, she guards it jealously! And we! we might as well have been hatched in an Egyptian oven! No wonder we are hard, isolated, like civil strangers. I have a heart! Yes, I have, but it is there by mistake, while no one cares

for it — all throw it from them. Oh! if I was but a village child, a weeding woman, that very baby, so that I might only have the affection that comes like the air to the weakest, the meanest. That precious baby! he smiled at me: he looked as if he would know me. Oh! he is far more loveable, with those sweet, little, delicate features, and large considering eyes, than if he was a great, plump, common-looking child. Dearest little Johnnie! And my own brother was like him — my brother, whom my aunt as good as killed! If he had lived, perhaps I might still have a brother to myself. He would be twenty-eight. But I mind nothing now that dear child is here! Why, Pauline, I sent you to Master Martindale."

"Yes, Ma'am; but Mrs. Martindale is there, and they are much obliged to you, but want nothing more."

Indeed Violet, who had been positively alarmed and depressed at first, at the waste and desolate aspect of the nursery, which seemed so far away and neglected, as almost, she thought, to account for the death of the two little sisters, had now found Sarah beset on all sides by offers of service from maids constantly knocking at the door, and Theodora's own Pauline, saying she was sent by Miss Martindale.

Violet could hardly believe her ears.

"Yes," said Sarah, "Miss Martindale has been here herself ever so long. A fine, well-grown lassie she is, and very like the Captain."

"Has she been here?" said Violet. "It is very kind of her. Did she look at the baby?"

"She made more work with him than you do yourself. Nothing was not good enough for him. Why she called him the most beautifullest baby she ever seen!"

"And that we never told you, my Johnnie," said Violet, smiling. "Are you sure she was not laughing at you, baby?"

"No, no, Ma'am," said Sarah, affronted; "it was earnest enough. She was nigh ready to eat him up, and talked to

him, and he looked up quite 'cute, as if he knew what it all meant, and was quite good with her. She was ready to turn the house upside down when they did not answer the bell. And how she did kiss him, to be sure! I'd half a mind to tell her of old nurse telling you it warn't good for the child to be always kissing of him."

"No, no, she won't hurt him," said Violet, in a half mournful voice. "Let her do as she likes with him, Sarah."

Violet could recover from the depression of that cold reception now that she found Johnnie did not share in the dislike. "She loves Arthur's child," thought she, "though she cannot like me. I am glad Johnnie has been in his aunt's arms!"

Violet, as she sat at the dinner-table, understood Lord Martindale's satisfaction in hearing John talking with animation; but she wondered at the chill of manner between her husband and his sister, and began to perceive that it was not, as she had supposed, merely in an occasional impatient word, that Arthur resented Theodora's neglect of her.

"How unhappy it must make her! how much it must add to her dislike! they must be brought together again!" were gentle Violet's thoughts. And knowing her ground better, she could venture many more steps towards conciliation than last year: but Theodora disappeared after dinner, and Violet brought down some plants from the Isle of Wight which John had pronounced to be valuable, to his mother; but Mrs. Nesbit, at the first glance, called them common flowers, and shoved them away contemptuously, while Lady Martindale tried to repair the discourtesy by condescending thanks and admiration of the neat drying of the specimens; but her stateliness caused Violet to feel herself sinking into the hesitating tremulous girl she used to be, and she betook herself to her work, hoping to be left to silence; but she was molested by a very sharp, unpleasant examination from Mrs. Nesbit on the style of John's house-keeping at Vent-

nor, and the society they had met there. It was plain, she thought, he had put himself to a foolish expense, and something was said of 'absurd' when cross-examination had elicited the fact of the pony-carriage. Then came a set of questions about Mr. Fotheringham's return, and strong condemnation of him for coming home to idle in England.

It was a great relief when John came in, and instantly took up the defence of the ophrys, making out its species so indisputably, that Mrs. Nesbit had no refuge but in saying, specimens were worthless that had not been gathered by the collector, and Lady Martindale made all becoming acknowledgments. No wonder Mrs. Nesbit was mortified; she was an excellent botanist, and only failing eyesight could have made even prejudice betray her into such a mistake. Violet understood the compassion that caused John to sit down by her and diligently strive to interest her in conversation.

Theodora had returned as tea was brought in, and Violet felt as if she must make some demonstration out of gratitude for the fondness for her child; but she did not venture on that subject, and moving to her side, asked, with somewhat timid accents, after Charlie Layton, the dumb boy.

"He is very well, thank you. I hope to get him into an asylum next year," said Theodora, but half-pleased.

"I looked for him at the gate, and fancied it was him I saw with a broad black ribbon on his hat. Is he in mourning?"

"Did you not hear of his mother's death?"

"No, poor little fellow."

Therewith Theodora had the whole history to tell, and thawed as she spoke; while Violet's deepening colour, and eyes ready to overflow, proved the interest she took; and she had just begged to go to-morrow to see the little orphan, when Arthur laid his hand on her shoulder, and told her he had just come from the stables, where her horse was in readiness for her, and would she like to ride to-morrow?"

"What will suit you for us to do?" said Violet, turning to Theodora.

"O, it makes no difference to me."

"Tuesday. It is not one of your schooldays, is it?" said Violet, appearing unconscious of the chill of the answer; then, looking up to Arthur, "I am going, at any rate, to walk to the lodge with Theodora to see the poor baby there. It is just the age of Johnnie."

"You aren't going after poor children all day long," said Arthur: and somehow Violet made a space between them on the ottoman, and pulled him down into it; and whereas he saw his wife and sister apparently sharing the same pursuits, and on friendly terms, he resumed his usual tone with Theodora, and began coaxing her to ride with them, and inquiring after home interests, till she lighted up and answered in her natural manner. Then Violet ventured to ask if she was to thank her for the delicious geranium and heliotrope she had found in her room.

"Oh no! that is an attention of Harrison or Miss Piper, I suppose."

"Or? probably and?" suggested Arthur. "How does that go on?"

"Take care," said Theodora, peeping out beyond the shadow of his broad shoulder. "'T is under the strictest seal of confidence; she asked my advice as soon as she had done it."

"What! has she accepted him?" said Violet. "Has it come to that?"

"Ay; and now she wants to know whether people will think it odd and improper. Let them think, I say."

"A piece of luck for her," said Arthur; "better marry a coal-heaver than lead her present life."

"Yes; and Harrison is an educated man though a coxcomb, and knows she condescends."

"But why are they waiting?" asked Violet.

"Because she dares not tell my aunt. She trembles and consults, and walks behind my aunt's chair in the garden,

exchanging glances with Harrison over her head, while he listens to discourses on things with hard names. The flutter and mystery seem to be felicity, and, if they like it, 't is their own concern."

"Now I know why Miss Piper told me Miss Martindale was so considerate," said Violet.

What had become of the estrangement? Arthur had forgotten it, Violet had been but half-conscious of it, even while uniting them; Theodora thought all was owing to his being at home, and she knew not who had restored him.

Indeed, the jealous feeling was constantly excited, for Arthur's devotion to his wife was greater than ever, in his delight at being with her again, and his solicitude to the weakness which Theodora could neither understand nor tolerate. She took all unclassified ailments as fine lady nonsense; and was angry with Violet for being unable to teach at school, contemptuous if Arthur observed on her looking pale, and irate if he made her rest on the sofa.

John added to the jealousy. Little as Theodora apparently regarded him, she could not bear to be set aside while Violet held the place of the favourite sister, and while her father openly spoke of the benefit he had derived from having that young bright gentle creature so much with him.

The alteration was indeed beyond what could have been hoped for. The first day, when his horse was led round with the others, it was supposed to be by mistake, till he came down with his whip in his hand; and not till they were past the lodge did Theodora believe he was going to make one of the riding party. She had never seen him take part in their excursions, or appear to consider himself as belonging to the younger portion of the family, and when they fell in with any acquaintance Arthur was amused, and she was provoked, at the surprised congratulations on seeing Mr. Martindale with them.

Lord Martindale was delighted to find him taking interest in matters to which he had hitherto scarcely paid even languid attention; and the offer to go to Barbuda was so

suitable and gratifying that it was eagerly discussed in many a consultation.

He liked to report progress to Violet, and as she sat in the drawing-room, the two brothers coming to her with all their concerns, Theodora could have pined and raged in the lonely dignity of her citadel upstairs. She did not know the forbearance that was exercised towards her by one whom she had last year taught what it was to find others better instructed than herself in the family councils.

Violet never obtruded on her, her intimacy with John's designs, thinking it almost unfair on his sister that any other should be more in his confidence.

So, too, Violet would not spoil her pleasure in her stolen caresses of little Johnnie by seeming to be informed of them. She was grateful for her love to him, and would not thrust in her unwelcome self. In public the boy was never seen and rarely mentioned, and Theodora appeared to acquiesce in the general indifference, but whenever she was secure of not being detected, she lavished every endearment on him, rejoiced in the belief that he knew and preferred her enough to offend his doting mamma, had she known it; never guessing that Violet sometimes delayed her visits to the nursery, in order not to interfere with her enjoyment of him.

Violet had not yet seen the Brandons, as they had been making visits before returning home; but she had many ardent letters from Emma, describing the progress of her acquaintance with Miss Marstone, the lady who had so excited her imagination, and to whom she had been introduced at a school festival. She seemed to have realized all Emma's expectations, and had now come home with her to make some stay at Rickworth. Violet was highly delighted when a few days after their return, her friends were invited to dinner, on the same evening that Mr. Fotheringham was expected. The afternoon of that day was one of glowing August sunshine, almost too much for Violet, who, after they had ridden some distance, was rather frightened to hear Theodora propose to extend their ride by

a canter over the downs; but John relieved her by asking her to return with him, as he wanted to be at home in time to receive Mr. Fotheringham.

Accordingly, they rode home quietly together, but about an hour after, on coming upstairs, he was surprised to find Violet in her evening dress, pacing the gallery with such a countenance that he exclaimed, "I hope there is nothing amiss with the boy."

"Oh, nothing, thank you, he is quite well," but her voice was on the verge of tears. "Is Mr. Fotheringham come?"

"No, I have given him up now, till the mail train; but it is not very late; Arthur and Theodora can't be back till past seven if they go to Whitford down," said John, fancying she was in alarm on their account.

"I do not suppose they can."

"I am afraid we took you too far. Why are you not resting?"

"It is cooler here," said Violet. "It does me more good than staying in my room."

"Oh, you get the western sun there."

"It comes in hot and dazzling all the afternoon till it is baked through, and I can't find a cool corner. Even baby is fretful in such a hot place, and I have sent him out into the shade."

"Is it always so?"

"O, no, only on such days as this; and I should not care about it to-day, but for one thing"— she hesitated, and lowered her voice, partly piteous, partly ashamed. "Don't you know, since I have been so weak and stupid, how my face burns when I am tired? and, of all things, Arthur dislikes a flushed face. There, now I have told you; but I could not help it. It is vain and foolish and absurd to care, almost wicked, and I have told myself so fifty times; but I have got into a fret, and I cannot leave off. I tried coming here to be cool, but I feel it growing worse, and there 's the dinner party, and Arthur will be vexed"— and she was almost cry-

ing. "I am doing what I thought I never would again, and about such nonsense."

"Come in here," said John, leading her into a pleasant apartment fitted up as a library, the fresh air coming through the open window. "I was wishing to show you my room."

"How cool! Arthur told me it was the nicest room in the house," said Violet, her attention instantly diverted.

"Yes, am I not a luxurious man? There, try my great arm-chair. I am glad to have a visit from you. You must come again."

"Oh! thank you. What quantities of books! No wonder every book one wants comes out of your room."

"I shall leave you the use of them."

"Do you mean that I may take any of your books home with me?"

"It will be very good for them."

"How delightful," and she was up in a moment reading their titles, but he made her return to the great chair.

"Rest now, there will be plenty of time, now you know your way. You must make this your retreat from the sun. Ah, by the bye, I have just recollected that I brought something for you from Madeira. I chose it because it reminded me of the flowers you wore at the Whitford ball."

It was a wreath of pink and white brier roses, in the feather flowers of Madeira, and she was delighted, declaring Arthur would think it beautiful, admiring every bud and leaf, and full of radiant girlish smiles. It would exactly suit her dress, Arthur's present, now worn for the first time.

"You are not going yet?"

"I thought I might be in your way."

"Not at all; if I had anything to do, I would leave you to the books; but I have several things to show you."

"I was wishing to look at those drawings. Who is that queen with the cross on her arm?"

"St. Helena; it is a copy from a fresco by one of the old masters."

"What a calm grave face! what strange stiff drawing! — and yet it suits it: it is so solemn, with that matronly dignity. That other, too — those apostles, with their bowed head and clasped hands, how reverent they look!"

"They are from Cimabue," said John: "are they not majestically humble in adoration?"

Between these two hung that awful dark engraving from Albert Dürer.

"These have been my companions," said John.

"Through all the long months that you have been shut up here?"

"My happiest times."

"Ah! that does, indeed, make me ashamed of my discontent and ingratitude," sighed Violet.

"Nay," said John, "a little fit of fatigue deserves no such harsh names."

"When it is my besetting sin — all here speaks of patience and unrepining."

"No, no," said John — "if you cannot sit still; I have sat still too much. We have both a great deal to learn."

As he spoke he unlocked a desk, took out a miniature, looked at it earnestly, and then in silence put it into her hand. She was disappointed; she knew she was not to expect beauty; but she had figured to herself a saintly, spiritual, pale countenance, and she saw that of a round-faced, rosy-cheeked, light-haired girl, looking only as if she was sitting for her picture.

After much doubt what to say, she ventured only, "I suppose this was done a long time ago?"

"When she was quite a girl. Mrs. Percival gave it to me: it was taken for her long before. I used not to like it."

"I did not think she would have had so much colour."

"It was a thorough English face: she did not lose those rosy cheeks till want of air faded them. Then I should hardly have known her; but the countenance had become so much more — calm it had always been, reminding me of the description of Jeanie Deans' countenance — I cannot tell

you what it was then! I see a little dawning of that serenity on the mouth, even as it is here; but I wish anything could give you an idea of that look!"

"Thank you for showing it to me," said Violet, earnestly.

After studying it a little while, he restored it to its place. He then took out a small box, and, after a moment's hesitation, put into Violet's hands a pink coral cross, shaped by the animals themselves, and fastened by a ring to a slender gold chain.

"The cross!" said Violet, holding it reverently: "it is very kind of you to let me see it."

"Would you like to keep it, Violet?"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and stopped short, with tearful eyes.

"You know she wished some one to have it who would find comfort in it, as she did."

"No one will prize it more; but can you bear to part with it?"

"If you will take it, as her gift."

"But just now, when I have been so naughty — so unlike her!"

"More like her than ever, in struggling with besetting failings; you are learning to see in little trials the daily cross; and if you go on, the serenity which was a gift in her will be a grace in you."

They were interrupted: Brown, with beaming face, announced "Mr. Fotheringham;" and there stood a gentleman, strong and broad-shouldered, his face burnt to a deep red, his dark brown hair faded at the tips to a light rusty hue, and his irregular features, wide, smiling mouth, and merry blue eyes, bright with good humour.

"Ha, Percy! here you are!" cried John, springing towards him with joyful alacrity, and giving a hand that was eagerly seized.

"Well, John, how are you?" exclaimed a hearty voice.

"Arthur's wife:" and this unceremonious introduction

caused her to be favoured with a warm shake of the hand; but, much discomfited at being in their way, she hastily gathered up her treasures, and glided away as John was saying, "I had almost given you up."

"I walked round by Fowler's lodge, to bestow my little Athenian owl. I brought it all the way in my pocket, or on my hand, and I put him in Tom Fowler's charge while I am here. I could not think what fashionable young lady you had here. How has that turned out?"

"Excellently!" said John, warmly.

"She is a beauty!" said Percival.

"She can't help that, poor thing," said John: "she is an admirable creature; indeed, she sometimes reminds me of your sister." Then, as Percy looked at him, as if to be certain he was in his senses, "I don't expect others to see it; it is only one expression."

"How are you? You look in better case."

"I am wonderfully well, thank you. Has your romance come to a satisfactory *dénouement?*"

"The happy pair were at Malta when I started."

"And where have you been?"

"Oh! in all manner of queer places. I have been talking Latin with the folks in Dacia. Droll state of things there: one could fancy it Britain, or Gaul half settled by the Teutons, with the Roman sticking about them. But that 's too much to tell; I have heard nothing from home this age. How is Theodora? I am afraid she has outgrown her antics."

"She is not too much like other people."

"Are you all at home, and *in statu quo?*"

"Yes, except that my aunt is more aged and feeble."

"And Master Arthur has set up for a domestic character. It must be after a fashion of his own."

"Rather so," said John, smiling; "but it has done him a great deal of good. He has more heart in him than you and I used to think; and home is drawing it out, and making a man of him in spite of himself."

"How came she to marry him?"

"Because she knew no better, poor thing; her family promoted it, and took advantage of her innocence."

"Is she a sensible woman?"

"Why, poor child, she has plenty of sense, but it is not doing her justice to call her a woman. She is too fine a creature to come early to her full growth — she is a woman in judgment and a child in spirits."

"So, Arthur has the best of the bargain."

"He does not half understand her; but they are very much attached, and some day she will feel her influence and use it."

"Form herself first, and then him. I hope Mark Gardner will keep out of the way during the process."

"He is safe in Paris."

"And how have you been spending the summer?"

"I have been at Ventnor, getting through the *Crusaders*, and keeping house with Violet and her child, who both wanted sea air."

"What 's her name?"

"Violet."

"Well, that beats all! Violet! Why, Vi'let was what they called the old black cart-horse! I hope the child is Cowslip or Daisy!"

"No, he is John, my godson."

"John! You might as well be called Man! It is no name at all. That Arthur should have gone and married a wife called Violet!!"

Meanwhile Violet was wondering over the honour she had received, caressing the gift, and thinking of the hopes that had faded over it till patience had done her perfect work. She did not remember her other present till she heard sounds betokening the return of the riders. She placed it on her head, and behold! the cheeks had no more than their own roseate tinting, and she was beginning to hope Arthur would be pleased, when she became aware of certain dark eyes and a handsome face set in jet black hair, presenting itself over her shoulder in the long glass!

"You little piece of vanity! studying yourself in the glass, so that you never heard me come in! Well, you have done it to some purpose. Where did you get that thing?"

"John brought it from Madeira."

"I did not think he had so much taste. Where have you bottled it up all this time?"

"He forgot it till there was an opportunity for wearing it. Is it not pretty? And this is your silk, do you see?"

"Very pretty, that 's the *rale* thing. I am glad to find you in good trim. I was afraid Theodora had taken you too far, and the heat would knock you up, and the boy would roar till you were all manner of colours."

"I was hot and tired, but John invited me into his nice cool room, and only think! he showed me Helen's picture."

"He has one, has he? She was nothing to look at; just like Percy — you know he is come?"

"Yes, he came while I was in John's room. He is not at all like what I expected."

"No, ladies always expect a man to look like a hero or a brigand. She had just that round face, till the last when I saw her in London, and then she looked a dozen years older than John — enough to scare one."

"See what he gave me."

"Ha! was that hers? I remember, it was that my aunt kicked up such a dust about. So he has given you that."

"Helen said she should like some one to have it who would find as much comfort in it as she did."

"Comfort! What comfort do you want?"

"Only when I am foolish."

"I should think so; and pray what is to be the comfort of a bit of coral like that?"

"Not the coral, but the thoughts, dear Arthur," said Violet, colouring, and restoring the cross to its place within her dress.

"Well! you and John understand your own fancies, but I am glad you can enter into them with him, poor fellow! It cheers him up to have some one to mope with."

CHAPTER IX.

P. Henry. — But do you use me thus, Ned; must I marry your sister?
Poins. — May the wench have no worse fortune, but I never said so.
K. Henry IV.

Arthur met the new-comer, exclaiming, "Ha! Fotheringham, you have not brought me the amber mouth-piece I desired John to tell you of."

"Not I. I don't bring Turk's fashions into Christian countries. You ought to learn better manners now you are head of a family."

Theodora entered, holding her head somewhat high; but there was a decided heightening of the glow on her cheek as Mr. Fotheringham shook hands with her. Lord Martindale gave him an affectionate welcome, and Lady Martindale, though frigid at first, grew interested as she asked about his journey.

The arriving guests met him with exclamations of gladness, as if he was an honour to the neighbourhood; and John had seldom looked more cheerful and more gratified than in watching his reception.

At length came the names for which Violet was watching; and the presence of Lady Elizabeth gave her a sense of motherly protection, as she was greeted with as much warmth as was possible for shy people in the midst of a large party. Emma eagerly presented her two friends to each other, and certainly they were a great contrast. Miss Marstone was sallow, with thin sharply-cut features, her eyes peered out from spectacles, her hair was disposed in the plainest manner, as well as her dress, which was anything but suited to a large dinner party. Violet's first impulse was to be afraid of her, but to admire Emma for being attracted by worth through so much formidable singularity.

"And the dear little godson is grown to be a fine fellow," began Emma.

"Not exactly that," said Violet, "but he is much improved, and so bright and clever."

"You will let us see him after dinner?"

"I have been looking forward to it very much, but he will be asleep, and you won't see his pretty ways and his earnest dark eyes."

"I long to see the sweet child," said Miss Marstone. "I dote on such darlings. I always see so much in their countenances. There is the germ of so much to be drawn out hereafter in those deep looks of thought."

"My baby often looks very intent."

"Intent on thoughts beyond our power to trace!" said Miss Marstone.

"Ah! I have often thought that we cannot fathom what may be passing in a baby's mind," said Emma.

"With its fixed eyes unravelling its whole future destiny!" said Miss Marstone.

"Poor little creature!" murmured Violet.

"I am convinced that the whole course of life takes its colouring from some circumstance at the time unmarked."

"It would frighten me to think so," said Violet.

"For instance, I am convinced that a peculiar bias was given to my own disposition in consequence of not being understood by the nurse and aunt who petted my brother, while they neglected me. Perhaps I was not a prepossessing child, but I had deeper qualities which might have been drawn out, though, on the whole, I do not regret what threw me early on my own resources. It has made me what I am."

Violet was rather surprised, but took it for granted that this was something admirable.

"Your dear little boy, no doubt, occupies much of your attention. Training and instruction are so important."

"He is not five months old," said Violet.

"You cannot begin too early to lead forward his mind. Well chosen engravings, properly selected toys, the habit of at once obeying, the choice of nursery songs, all are of much importance in forming these dear little lambs to the stern discipline of life."

"You must have had a great deal to do with little children," said Violet, impressed.

"Why, not much personally; but I believe Emma has sent you my little allegory of *The Folded Lambs*, where you will find my theories illustrated."

"Yes, Emma gave it to me — it is very pretty," said Violet, looking down. "I am too stupid to understand it all, and I have been hoping for Emma to explain it to me."

"Many people find it obscure, but I shall be delighted to assist you. I am sure you will find some of the ideas useful to you. What were your difficulties?"

It made Violet so very shy to be spoken to by an authoress in public about her own books, that she was confused out of all remembrance of the whole story of the "Folded Lambs," and could only feel thankful that the announcement of dinner came to rescue her from her difficulties. She was not to escape authors; for Mr. Fotheringham took her in to dinner, Lady Martindale assigned Miss Brandon to John; but Arthur, with a droll look, stepped between and made prize of her, leaving John to Miss Marstone.

Violet trusted she was not likely to be examined in the *Track of the Crusaders*, of which, however, she comprehended far more than of the *Folded Lambs*. Presently her neighbour turned to her, asking abruptly, "Who is that next to Theodora?"

"Mr. Wingfield, the clergyman here."

"I know. Is he attentive to the parish?"

"O yes, very much so."

"Does Theodora take to parish work?"

"Indeed she does."

"What, thoroughly?"

"She goes to school twice a-week, besides Sundays, and has the farm children to teach every morning."

"That 's right."

"And she is so kind to the children at the Lodge."

"Let me see, they were afraid the boy was deaf and dumb."

"Yes, he is, poor little fellow, and Theodora teaches him most successfully."

"Well done! I knew the good would work out. How tall she is! and she looks as full of spirit as ever. She has had a season in London, I suppose?"

"Yes, she went out a great deal this spring."

"And it has not spoilt her?"

"O no!" cried Violet warmly, feeling as if she had known him all her life, "she is more eager than ever in her parish work. She spares no trouble. She got up at four one morning to sit with old Betty Blain, that her daughter might get a little rest."

"That head and brow are a fine study. She has grown up more striking than even I thought she would. Curious to see the difference between natural pride and assumed," and he glanced from Theodora to her mother. "How well Lady Martindale preserves! She always looks exactly the same. Who is that chattering in John's ear?"

"Miss Marstone, a friend of Miss Brandon's!"

"What makes her go about such a figure?"

"She is very good."

"I trust, by your own practice, that is not your test of goodness?"

"I should not think it was," said Violet, blushing and hesitating.

"What crypt did they dig her out of? Is she one of the Marstones of Gothlands?"

"I believe she is. She has two sisters, gay people, whose home is with an uncle. She lives with a lawyer brother."

"Sam Marstone! I know him! I pity him. So Emma Brandon is come out? Which is she?"

"She is next to Arthur, on this side the table where you cannot see her."

"What sort of girl is she?"

"Oh!" said Violet, and paused, "she is the greatest friend I have in the world!"

He looked surprised, laughed, and said, "So I must ask no more questions."

Violet felt as if she had spoken presumptuously, and said, "Lady Elizabeth has been so very kind to me. Emma is my baby's godmother."

"And John its godfather."

"Yes. Did he tell you so?"

"Ay! he spoke as if it was very near his heart."

"He has been — O, so very — I believe he is very fond of baby," hastily concluded Violet, as her first sentence stuck in her throat.

"I am heartily glad he has something to take interest in. He looks better and less frail. Is he so, do you think?"

"O yes, much better. He hardly ever coughs —"

"Does he get those bad fits of cough and breathlessness?"

"Very seldom; he has not had one since the day we heard you were coming home, and that, Brown thought, was from the excitement."

"Ay! ay! he seems stronger every way."

"Yes, he can bear much more exertion."

"Then I hope he will be stirred up to do something. That 's what he wants."

"I am sure he is always very busy," said Violet, displeased.

"Ay? Cutting open a book was rather arduous. If he was not at his best he left it to Brown."

"No! no! I meant going over parchments; writing for Lord Martindale;" she did not know if she might mention the West Indian scheme.

"Ho! there 's something in that. Well, if he comes to life after all, there 's no one so capable. Not that I am blaming him. Illness and disappointment broke him down, and — such a fellow seldom breathed. If I had not had him at Cambridge it might have been a different story with me. So you need not look like his indignant champion."

"I don't know what Arthur and I should have done without him," said Violet.

"Where 's the aunt? I don't see her."

"She never comes down to dinner, she is only seen in the evening."

There was a sound in reply so expressive of relief that Violet caught herself nearly laughing, but he said, gravely, "Poor woman, then she is growing aged."

"We thought her much altered this year."

"Well!" and there was a whole sentence of pardon conveyed in the word. Then, after an interval, "Look at John and his neighbour."

"I have been trying to catch what they are saying."

"They! It is all on one side."

"Perhaps," said Violet, smiling, "it was something about chants."

"Yes. Is it not rare to see his polite face while she bores him with that kind of cant which is the most intolerable of all, and he quietly turning it aside?"

"Is it cant when people are in earnest?" asked Violet.

"Women always think they are."

"How are they to know?"

"If they hold their tongues" — a silence — "Well!"

"Well," said Violet.

"Where 's the outcry?"

"Did you mean me to make one?"

"What could you do but vindicate your sex?"

"Then you would not have thought me in earnest." He made a funny pleased face and a little bow.

"The truth was," said Violet, "I was thinking whether I understood you."

"May I ask your conclusion?"

"I don't exactly know. I don't think you meant we should never talk of what interests us."

"When they know when to hold their tongues, perhaps I should have said."

"O, yes, that I quite think."

Another silence, while Violet pondered, and her neighbour continued his malicious listening to Miss Marstone, who spoke in a key too audible for such a party. Presently, "He has

got her to the Royal Academy. She has gone forthwith to the Præ-Raffaelites. Oh! she is walking Præ-Raffaelitism herself. Symbols and emblems! Unfortunate John! Symbolic suggestive teaching, speaking to the eye! She is at it ding dong! Oh! he has begun on the old monk we found refreshing the pictures at Mount Athos! Ay, talk yourself, 't is the only way to stop her mouth; only mind what you say, she will bestow it freshly hashed up on the next victim on the authority of Mr. Martindale."

Violet was excessively entertained; and, when she raised her eyes, after conquering the laugh, was amazed to find how far advanced was the state dinner, usually so interminable. Her inquiries after the Athenian owl led to a diverting history of its capture at the Parthenon, and the adventures in bringing it home. She was sorry when she found Lady Martindale rising, while Mr. Fotheringham, as he drew back his chair, said, "How shall you get on with Præ-Raffaelitism? I should like to set her and Aunt Nesbit together by the ears!"

Certainly it was not convenient to be asked by Emma what made her look so much amused.

She felt as if it would be much pleasanter to show off her babe without the stranger, and was glad to find that Miss Marstone had fallen into a discussion with Theodora, and both looked much too eager to be interrupted.

So Violet fairly skipped upstairs before her friends, turning round to speak to them with such smiling glee, that Lady Elizabeth dismissed all fears of her present well doing. Emma fell into raptures over her godson's little cot, and quoted the *Folded Lambs*, and *Pearls of the Deep*, another as yet unpublished tale of her friend's, to teach his mother how to educate him, and stood by impatiently contemning the nursery hints which Violet was only too anxious to gather up from Lady Elizabeth.

"And are you not charmed with her?" said Emma, as they went down stairs.

"I have seen so little of her," replied Violet, embarrassed. "Why does she dress in that way?"

"That is just what I say," observed Lady Elizabeth. "I was sorry to see her in that dress this evening."

"Mamma does not like it," said Emma; "but Theresa feels it such a privilege not to be forced to conform to the trammels of fashions and nonsense."

"She does everything on high principle," said Lady Elizabeth, as if she was trying to bring her mind as usual into unison with her daughter's. "She is a very superior person, and one does not like to find fault with what is done on right motives; but I should be sorry to see Emma follow the same line. I have always been taught that women should avoid being conspicuous."

"That I could never bear to be, Mamma," said Emma; "but Theresa is of a firmer, less shrinking mould."

Lady Elizabeth repeated that she was a very superior person, but was evidently not happy in her guest.

Miss Marstone was holding earnest *tête-à-têtes* all the evening, but Violet having sheltered herself under Lady Elizabeth's wing, escaped the expected lecture on the allegories.

When the Rickworth party had taken leave, Mr. Wingfield, the last guest, was heard to observe that Miss Marstone was an admirable person, a treasure to any parish.

"Do you wish for such a treasure in your own?" said Mr. Fotheringham, bluntly.

The curate shook his head, and murmuring something about Brogden being already as fortunate as possible, departed in his turn; while Arthur ejaculated, "There 's a step, Wingfield. Why, Theodora, he was setting up a rival."

"Who is she?" said Theodora. "Where did Emma pick her up?"

"Emma was struck with her appearance —"

The gentlemen all exclaimed so vehemently, that Violet had to repeat it again, whereupon Mr. Fotheringham muttered, "Every one to his taste;" and Arthur said there

ought to be a law against women making themselves greater frights than nature designed.

"So, it is a fit of blind enthusiasm," said John.

"Pray do you partake it?" asked Percy. "How do you feel after it?"

"Why, certainly, I never met with a person of more conversation," said John.

"Delicately put!" said Arthur, laughing heartily. "Why, she had even begun lecturing my father on the niggers!"

"I would not be Lady Elizabeth!" said Mr. Fotheringham.

"Those romantic exaggerations of friendship are not satisfactory," said John. Emma is too timid to be eccentric herself at present; but a governing spirit might soon lead her on."

"That it might," said Theodora, "as easily as I used to drag her, in spite of her terrors, through all the cows in the park. I could be worse to her than any cow; and this Ursula — or what is her outlandish name, Violet?"

"Theresa; Sarah Theresa."

"Well, really," said John, "it is not for the present company to criticise outlandish names."

"No," said Arthur, "it was a happy instinct that made us give my boy a good rational working-day name, fit to go to school in, and no choice either to give him the opportunity of gainsaying it, like Emma's friend, and some others — Sir Percival, that is to be! A hero of the Minerva press!"

"No, indeed — if I was to be Sir Anything, which probably I never shall be, I would hold, like my forefathers, to my good old Antony, which it was not my doing to disregard."

"Which earned him the title of Lumpkin, by which only he was known to his schoolfellow!" said Arthur. "If you ask after Fotheringham, they invariably say, 'Oh, you mean old Lumpkin!' So much for romantic names!"

"Or imperial ones," said Percy. "Did not you tell me Theodora came straight from the Palæologos who died in

the West Indies? I always considered that to account for certain idiosyncrasies."

Theodora was called away to assist Mrs. Nesbit upstairs; and as Violet followed, she heard the aunt observing that Percival Fotheringham was more bearish than ever; and that it was intolerable to see him encouraged in his free and easy manner when he had thrown away all his prospects.

"For poor John's sake," began Lady Martindale.

"For his own," interrupted Theodora. "He has every right to be at home here, and it is an honour to the place that he should be so."

"Oh, yes, I know; and he will be expecting your father to exert himself again in his behalf."

"No, he will be beholden to no one," said Theodora.

"I do wish his manners were less rough and eccentric," said Lady Martindale.

"Presuming," said Mrs. Nesbit; "in extremely bad taste. I never was more sensible of our good fortune in having missed that connexion. There was nothing but their being of a good old family that made it by any means endurable."

At this hit at her brother's wife, Theodora was going to speak, but she forbore, and only wished her aunt good night. It would not be repressed, however; she stood in the gallery, after parting with the elder ladies, and said, loud enough for them to hear,

"I hate good old family, and all such humbug! She was a noble, self-devoted creature; as much above the comprehension of the rest of the world as her brother!"

"Did you know her well?" said Violet.

Theodora's tone instantly changed. She was not going to gratify childish curiosity. "I never had the opportunity," she said, coldly. "Good night."

Violet was disappointed; for the tone of enthusiasm had given her a moment's hope that they had at last found a subject on which they could grow warm together, but it was evident that Theodora would never so have spoken had she been conscious of her presence.

The next morning as Arthur and his wife were going down to breakfast, he said, "We shall see some rare fun now Theodora and Fotheringham have got together."

Theodora, with her bonnet on, was, according to her usual Sunday fashion, breakfasting before the rest of the party, so as to be in time for school. John and his friend made their appearance together; and the greetings had scarcely passed, before John, looking out of window, exclaimed, "Ah! there 's the boy! Pray come and see my godson. Come, Violet, we want you to exhibit him."

Arthur looked up with a smile intended to be disdainful, but which was gratified, and moved across, with the newspaper in his hand, to lean against the window-shutter.

"There 's John without his hat — he is growing quite adventurous. Very pretty Violet always is with the boy in her arms — she is the show one of the two. Hollo, if Percy has not taken the monkey himself; that 's a pass beyond me. How she colours and smiles — just look, Theodora, is it not a picture?"

If he had called her to look at Johnnie, she must have come; but she was annoyed at his perpetual admiration, and would not abet his making himself ridiculous.

"I must not wait," she said; "I am late."

Arthur shrugged his shoulders, and turned to his paper.

She put on her gloves, and took up her books; Percy meeting her, as she came down the steps, said,

"I have been introduced to your nephew."

"I hope you are gratified."

"He has almost too much countenance," said Percy. "There is something melancholy in such wistful looks from a creature that cannot speak, just as one feels with a dog."

"I am afraid he is very weakly," said Theodora.

"I am sorry to hear it; it seems like a new life to John; and that pretty young mother looks so anxious. Do you see much of her?"

"Not much; I have not time to join in the general Violet worship."

"They are not spoiling her, I hope. It does one good to see such a choice specimen of womankind."

"There, don't come any further; I must make haste."

"Like all the rest," she thought; "not a man but is more attracted by feminine airs and graces than by sterling qualities."

On coming out of church, in the afternoon, John, looking at the beautiful green shady bank of the river, proposed a walk along it; all the party gladly acceded, except Theodora, who, not without a certain pleasure in separating herself from them, declared that there was a child, who must be made to say her hymn, before going home.

"Can't you excuse her for once?" said Lord Martindale.

"No, Papa."

"Not if I beg her off publicly?"

"No, thank you. There is a temper that must be overcome."

"Then flog her well, and have done with it," said Arthur.

Deigning no reply, she pounced upon her victim as the procession of scholars came out of church, "Come, I am waiting to hear you say it. 'How doth the little —'"

The child stood like a post.

"That is a Benson, I am sure," said Mr. Fotheringham.

Theodora told him he was right, and went on exhorting the child; "Come, I know you can say it. Try to be good."

"'How doth —'"

"You know I always keep my word, and I have said I will hear you before either of us goes home."

"'How doth—'"

"If you please, Papa, would you go on? I shall never make her do it with you all looking on."

She sat down on a tombstone, and placed the child before her. After an hour's walk, there was a general exclamation of amusement and compassion, on seeing Theodora and the child still in the same positions.

"She will never say it at all now, poor child," said Violet; "she can't — she must be stupified."

"Then we had better send down the tent to cover Theodora for the night," said Arthur.

"As if Theodora looking at her in that manner was not enough to drive off all recollection!" said John.

"It is too much!" said Lord Martindale. "Arthur, go, and tell her it is high time to go home, and she must let the poor child off."

Arthur shrugged his shoulders, saying, "You go, John."

"Don't you think it might do harm to interfere?" said John to his father.

"Interfere by no means," said Arthur. "It is capital sport. Theodora against dirty child! Which will you back, Percy? Hollo! where is he? He is in the thick of it. Come on, Violet, let us be in for the fun."

"Patience in seven flounces on a monument!" observed Mr. Fotheringham, in an undertone to Theodora, who started, and would have been angry, but for his most merry smile. He then turned to the child, whose face was indeed stupefied with sullenness, as if in the resistance she had forgotten the original cause. "What! you have not said it all this time? What 's your name? I know you are a Benson, but how do they call you?" said he, speaking with a touch of the dialect of the village, just enough to show he was a native.

"Ellen," said the girl.

"Ellen! that was your aunt's name. You are so like her. I don't think you can be such a very stupid child, after all. Are you? Suppose you try again. What is it Miss Martindale wants you to say?"

The child made no answer, and Theodora said, "The Little Busy Bee."

"Oh! that 's it. Not able to say the Busy Bee? That 's a sad story. D'ye think now I could say it, Ellen?"

"No!" with an astonished look, and a stolid countrified tone.

"So you don't think I'm clever enough! Well, suppose I try, and you set me right if I make mistakes."

"How doth the great idle wasp."

"Busy bee!" cried the child, scandalized.

By wonderful blunders, and ingenious halts, he drew her into prompting him throughout, then exclaimed, "There! you know it much better. I thought you were a clever little girl! Come, won't you say it once, and let me hear how well it sounds?"

She was actually flattered into repeating it perfectly.

"Very well. That 's right. Now, don't you think you had better tell Miss Martindale you are sorry to have kept her all this time."

She hung her head, and Theodora tried to give him a hint that the apology was by no means desired; but without regarding this, he continued, "Do you know I am come from Turkey, and there are plenty of ladies there, who go out to walk with a sack over their heads, but I never saw one of them sit on a tombstone to hear a little girl say the Busy Bee. Should you like to live there?"

"No."

"Do you suppose Miss Martindale liked to sit among the nettles on old Farmer Middleton's tombstone?"

"No."

"Why did she do it then? Was it to plague you?"

"'Cause I wouldn't say my hymn."

"I wonder if it is not you that have been plaguing Miss Martindale all the time. Eh? Come, aren't you sorry you kept her sitting all this time among the nettles when she might have been walking to Colman's Weir, and gathering such fine codlings and cream as Mrs. Martindale has there, and all because you would not say a hymn that you knew quite well? Wasn't that a pity?"

"Yes," and the eyes looked up ingenuously.

"Come and tell her you are sorry. Won't you? There, that 's right," and he dictated as she repeated after him, as

if under a spell. "I 'm sorry, Ma'am, that I was sulky and naughty; I 'll say it next Sunday, and make no fuss."

"There, that will do. I knew you would be good at last," said Percy, patting her shoulder, while Theodora signified her pardon, and they turned homewards, but had made only a few steps before the gallop of clumsy shoes followed, and there stood Ellen, awkwardly presenting a bunch of the willow herb. Theodora gave well-pleased thanks, and told her she should take them as a sign she was really sorry and meant to do better.

"And as a trophy of the force of Percy's pathetic picture of Miss Martindale's seven flounces among the nettles on Farmer Middleton's tombstone," said Arthur.

"You certainly are very much obliged to him," said her father.

"And most ungratefully she won't confess it," said Arthur.

"I despise coaxing," said Theodora.

"The question is, what you would have done without it?" said John.

"As if I could not subdue a little sprite like that!"

"You certainly might if it was a question of physical force," said Percy, as he seemed to be measuring with his eye the strength of Theodora's tall vigorous person.

"I spoke of moral force."

"There the sprite had decidedly the advantage. You could 'gar her grect,' but you could not 'gar her know.' She had only to hold out; and when Miss Martindale found it time to go home to dinner, and began to grow ashamed of her position, the victory was hers."

"He has you there, Theodora," said Arthur.

"I don't know what he is driving at," said Theodora.

"I am trying to find out whether Miss Martindale has the power of confessing that she was in a scrape."

"That you may triumph," said Theodora.

"No, not for the sake of triumph, but of old times," he answered, in a lower, more serious tone.

Theodora's face softened, and drawing nearer, she asked, "How are old times to be satisfied by such an admission?"

"Because then candour used to boast of conquering pride," said Percy, now speaking so as to be heard by her alone.

"Well. It was becoming a predicament, and you rescued me very ingeniously. There, will that content you?" said Theodora, with one of the smiles the more winning because so rare. "I am perfectly ready to own myself in the wrong when I see it."

"When you see it," said Percy, drily.

"I was wrong just now not to confess my obligation, because Arthur teased and triumphed; but I don't see why you all treat me as if I was wrong to set myself to subdue the child's obstinacy."

"Not wrong, but mistaken," said Percy. "You forgot your want of power to enforce obedience. You wanted victory, and treated her with the same determination she was treating you with. It was a battle which had the hardest will and could hold out longest."

"And if I had conquered she would have gone away angry with me, only having yielded because she could not help it. You softened her and made her sorry. I see. She really is a good child on the whole, and I dare say I shall do something with her now."

"Is old Benson alive?"

And a long conversation on village matters ensued.

Theodora was happier that evening than she had been for more than a year. That home thrust at her pride, astonishing as it was that any one should venture it, and the submission that followed, had been a positive relief. She thought the pleasure was owing to the appeal to old times, recalling happy days of wild frolics, sometimes shared, sometimes censured by her grown-up playfellow; the few hours with his sister that had influenced her whole life; and the lectures, earnest, though apparently sportive, by which

he had strengthened and carried on the impression; that brief time, also, of their last spending together, when his sorrow for his sister was fresh, and when John was almost in a hopeless state, and when she had been the one of the family to whom he came to pour out his grief, and talk over what his sister had been.

It was a renewal of happiness to her heart, wearied with jealousy, to find one to whom old times were precious, and who took her up where he had last seen her. His blunt ways, and downright attacks, were a refreshment to a spirit, chafing against the external smoothness and refinement of her way of life, and the pleasure of yielding to his arguments was something new and unexampled. She liked to gain the bright approving look, and with her universal craving for attention, she could not bear not to be engrossing him, whether for blame or praise, it did not matter; but she had the same wish for his notice that she had for Arthur's.

Not that she by any means always obtained it. He was in request with every one except Mrs. Nesbit. Even Lady Martindale took interest in his conversation, and liked to refer questions about prints and antiques to his decision; and calls on his time and attention were made from every quarter. Besides, he had his own manuscript to revise, and what most mortified Theodora was to hear Violet's assistance eagerly claimed, as she knew her way better than John did through the sheets, and could point to the doubtful passages. Never was work more amusing than this, interspersed with debates between the two friends, with their droll counter versions of each other's anecdotes, and Mr. Fotheringham's quizzings of John, at whom he laughed continually, though all the time it was plain that there was no one in the world whom he so much reverenced.

The solitary possession of her own mornings was now no boon to Theodora. She was necessary to no one, and all her occupations could not drive away the ever-gnawing thought that Violet attracted all the regard and attention that belonged to her. If the sensation went away when she

was downstairs, where Percy's presense obliged her to be amiable against her will, it came back with double force in her lonely moments.

One day, when they had dispersed after luncheon, her father came in, inquiring for Violet. He was going to Rickworth, and thought she would like to go with him. He wished to know, as otherwise he should ride instead of driving; and, as she was upstairs, desired Theodora to go and find out what would suit her.

"Papa, too!" thought Theodora, as with some reluctance, she for the first time knocked at her sister's door, and found her with the baby.

"How very kind!" said she. "I should be delighted, but I don't know whether Arthur does not want me. Is he there?"

"I think he is in the library."

"If I could but go down! But I must not take baby, and Sarah is at dinner. Should you mind holding him for one minute?"

Theodora held out her arms, but Johnnie, though usually delighted to come to her from Sarah, turned his head away, unwilling to leave his mother. He did not quite cry, but was so near it that she had to do her utmost to amuse him. She caught up something bright to hold before him, and was surprised to see it was a coral cross, which Violet, in changing her dress, had laid for a moment on the dressing-table. The coincidence was strange, thought Theodora.

Violet was coming back, and she would have laid it down, but Johnnie had grasped it in his little fingers. As his mother appeared, his merriest smile shone out, and his whole little person was one spring of eagerness to return to her.

"Little man! Is he glad to come back to his mamma?" Violet could not help saying, as he nestled joyously on her neck; but the cold face of Theodora made her sorry that the words had escaped her, and she began to express her thanks.

Theodora was stooping to pick up the cross, and a concerned exclamation passed Violet's lips on observing its fall.

"It is safe," said Theodora. "I beg your pardon, I took it up to amuse him."

"Thank you," said Violet. "I am sorry I seemed vexed. There 's no harm done; but I was frightened, because it was Helen's."

"Helen's!" exclaimed Theodora, extremely amazed. "Did John give it to you?"

"Yes, a little while ago," said Violet, colouring. "He—"

But Theodora was gone, with bitterer feelings than ever.

This girl was absorbing every one's love! John had never given her anything that had belonged to Helen; he had never even adverted to his engagement, when she almost adored her memory! She had never supposed him capable of speaking of his loss; and perhaps it was the hardest blow of all to find Violet, whose inquiries she had treated as mere curiosity, preferred to such confidence as this. She did not remember how she had once rejected his sympathy. She forgot whose fault it was that she had not been in the Isle of Wight; she laid it all on the proneness of men to be interested by sweetness of manner, and thought of herself as a strong-minded superior woman, who could never be loved, and could only suffer through her woman's heart.

Yet she could not entirely harden herself as she intended, while combats with Percy cast brightening gleams across her existence. She thought she should again settle into the winter's life of hard work and indifference which was on the whole most comfortable to her.

When the party should be broken up, Percy was to be the first to depart; he was going to publish *The Crusaders*, take a lodging in London, and there busy himself with literature while awaiting the fulfilment of a promise of further diplomatic employment. Arthur and Violet were also to return home after paying a visit at Rickworth, and John would soon after sail for Barbuda. In the mean time he was

much engaged in going over accounts, and in consulting with his father and the man of business.

One morning, towards the end of September, he came down to Violet in the drawing-room, looking much flushed and extremely annoyed.

"Well," he said, "I have often declared I would never let my aunt have a discussion with me again. I have been obliged to submit to this. I hope it will be the last."

"About the West Indian property?" said Violet.

"Yes. She does give me power to act for her; but it is dearly bought! I wish I had never asked her! Every subject that she knew to be most unpleasant to me has she stirred up! How a woman of her age can go on with her eyes fixed on these matters I cannot guess. I am sure it is a warning what one sets one's heart upon!"

"You are quite worried and tired. Oh! it has made you cough! You had better lie down and rest."

"I want you to put me into good humour," said he, half reclining on the sofa. "I feel as if I had been under a nutmeg-grater! What do you think of her taking me to task for having Fotheringham here, for fear he should marry Theodora! I wish there was any such chance for her; but Percy has far too much sense!"

"Why, how could Mrs. Nesbit think of it? They are always disputing!"

"I should not take that as a reason for thinking it impossible. But Percy knows her far too well. No, it is only one of my aunt's fancies. She has set her hopes on Theodora now; but it is of no use to talk of it. I don't want to dwell on it. It is too pitiable to be angry about. What are you reading?"

Violet was as glad to talk to him of her book as he was to lose the thought of his vexatious conversation, which had been even more annoying than he had chosen to tell her.

Mrs. Nesbit had taken occasion to speak of the reversion of an estate, which she said she wished to go to augment the property of the title; and *now* she should have no hesitation

in bequeathing it to him, provided she could see him, on his side, make such a connexion as would be for the consequence of the family.

John tried silence, but she drove him so hard that he was obliged to reply that, since she had begun on the subject, he had only to say that he should never marry; and, with thanks for her views, the disposal of her property would make no difference to him.

She interrupted him by reproaches on a man of his age talking romantic nonsense, and telling him that, for the sake of the family, it was his duty to marry.

"With such health as mine," replied John, quietly, "I have long made up my mind that, even if I could enter on a fresh attachment, it would not be right. I am not likely to live many years, and I wish to form no new ties. You will oblige me, Ma'am, by not bringing forward this subject again."

"Ay, I know what you are intending. You think it will come to Arthur and his wife; but I tell you what, Mr. Martindale, no attorney's daughter shall ever touch a sixpence of mine."

"That is as you please, Ma'am. It was not to speak of these matters that I came here; and if you have told me all you wish with regard to the property, I will leave the papers for your signature."

She was above all provoked by his complete indifference to the wealth, her chief consideration throughout her life, and could not cease from reproaching him with absurd disregard to his own interest, at which he very nearly smiled. Then she revived old accusations, made in the earlier days of her persecution about his engagement, that he was careless of the consequence and reputation of the family, and had all his life been trying to lower it in the eyes of the world; otherwise, why had he set himself to patronise that wife of Arthur's, or why bring Percy Fotheringham here, just to put his sister in the way of marrying beneath her? And when he had answered that though he saw no probabi-

lity of such an event, opinions might differ as to what was beneath Theodora, she took the last means that occurred to her for tormenting him, by predicting that Arthur's sickly little child would never live to grow up — he need not fix any hopes on him.

He escaped at last, leaving her much irritated, as Theodora presently found her. She began to complain bitterly of the ingratitude of her great-nephews, after all her labours for the family! John treating her whole fortune as if it was not worth even thanks, when she had been ready to settle the whole on him at once, as she would have done, since (and she looked sharply at Theodora) he was now free from that Fotheringham engagement; for none of that family should ever have a share in her property.

Theodora looked, if possible, more indifferent than John, as she answered,

"John could not want it. I always thought you meant it for Arthur."

"Arthur! as if you did not know he had forfeited all claim upon me!"

"His marriage is a reason for his needing it more," said Theodora.

"It is of no use to speak of him. No, Theodora, you alone have acted as I could wish; and if you continue to deserve my regard —"

"Don't say that, aunt Nesbit," said Theodora. "I shall act, as I hope, may deserve regard; but I don't want anybody's fortune, and if you left me yours, it would be very unfair, and I certainly should give at least half of it to Arthur. I give you fair warning; but I did not come to talk of such hateful things, but to read to you."

That afternoon Mrs. Nesbit wrote a letter to her lawyer, and surprised Miss Piper by asking if that puny child upstairs had any name but John.

CHAPTER X.

Unschooled affections, strong and wild,
Have been my playmates from a child,
And strengthening in the breast unseen,
Poisoned the fount within.

Thoughts in Past Years.

The morning of the next day had been fine, and was spent in shooting by Arthur and Mr. Fotheringham, but the latter came home in time to ride with John, to make a call on some old friends, far beyond what had long been John's distance.

The afternoon closed in a violent storm of wind and rain, which drove Arthur indoors, and compelled Violet to resort for exercise to the gallery, where she paced up and down with Johnnie in her arms, watching for the return of the others, as each turn brought her to the end window.

As Lord Martindale came upstairs, he paused at the sight of the slender young figure — her head bent over her little one. Perhaps he was thinking what might have been, if his own children had ever been as much to their mother, for when Violet turned towards him, he sighed, as he roused himself, and asked whether she saw John coming. Then joining her, he looked at his grandson, saying, "He is improving very fast. How like you he grows!"

"Poor little fellow, he was not at all well yesterday, and I began to think of asking whether I should send for Mr. Legh."

"Whatever you do, beware of doctoring!" was Lord Martindale's rather hasty answer. "Of doctoring and governessing! I have seen enough of it, and I resolved my two youngest should run wholesomely wild, never be dosed, and never learn a lesson till they were six years old."

"But this poor little man is really delicate, and I have no experience," pleaded Violet.

"Depend upon it, my dear," said Lord Martindale, with sorrowful emotion in his voice, as he saw the little fair head resting caressingly on her neck, "you are doing more for

him than all the physicians in England. You must not tease him and yourself with fretting and anxiety."

"I know it is my duty not to be over-anxious," said Violet, with her heart full, as she clasped her hands close round her tiny treasure.

"You must not," said his grandfather. "It was the notion that mine could never have enough teaching or doctoring — as if that was what they wanted! Some system or other was always being tried on them, and they were never left to healthy action of mind or body, till the end was that I lost my two pretty little girls! And poor John, I never saw a more wretched-looking child than he was when I took him to Dr. —."

"And what was his advice?"

"His advice was this. 'Throw away lessons and physic. Give him other children to play with, make him wear a brown holland pinafore, and let him grope in the dirt.' I believe it saved his life! I begged Mrs. Fotheringham to let him do just like her children, little thinking what was to come of that." Then catching himself up, as if fearing to give Violet pain, "Not that I should have regretted that connexion. She was all that could be wished, and I judged by personal merits." He hesitated, but spoke warmly, as if applying the words to Violet. "Their youth was *my* only objection from the first. Nothing would have rejoiced me more than their marriage."

"O, yes," said Violet, "he says so much of your kindness." She feared she had said too much, but Lord Martindale caught at her words. "Has he ever adverted to that affair?"

"Sometimes," said Violet, shyly.

"What! Actually spoken of poor Helen? I am heartily glad to hear it. How is he bearing it? Does he speak calmly?"

"Yes, calmly and cheerfully, as if he liked to dwell on the thought."

Lord Martindale laid his hand on her arm and said, gratefully, "You have done him a great deal of good."

Seldom had she been more gratified; but at that moment a dripping figure burst on them, and Theodora's voice impetuously exclaimed, "Violet! you must know something of babies! What shall I do for the child at the lodge? She will die if something is not done quickly."

She was in an agony of breathless agitation; the motherless baby at the lodge had been taken violently ill, the parish doctor was not at home, and she feared that Mr. Legh could not arrive from Whitford in time!

Violet shared in her distress, and gathering from her description that it might be such an attack as Johnnie's at Ventnor, longed to be on the spot, and tried to believe the rain lessening enough for her to go. Theodora seized on her proposal, but Lord Martindale interfered. "How can you be so thoughtless?" said he, in a far more decided manner than usual.

"The child's life depends on it!" said Theodora, vehemently.

"Pshaw!" said Lord Martindale, "Violet has her own life and her child's to think of."

"Then you won't come!"

"I am afraid I ought not," said Violet, mournfully.

Theodora flung away in passionate despair and contempt, and was rushing off, when Violet pursued her, and implored her to listen one moment, and she could not let go her last hope. Violet offered some medicine that had been prepared for Johnnie — which she was sure could at least do no harm, and she could give some advice. Perhaps she mingled it with too many excuses and lamentations at being forced to stay at home; at least, Theodora thought her fanciful, rejoicing in the self-importance of imaginary ill-health.

"Why! there 's the carriage!" she exclaimed, as it drove down the avenue.

"Yes, it is gone for John," said Theodora, bluntly.

"Where is he?"

"At the Goldingsby turnpike. He took shelter there, and Percy came back to order the carriage to fetch him. Percy is gone on to Whitford for Mr. Legh."

"What a pity! I could have gone to the lodge in the carriage."

Theodora was provoked that her impatience had made her miss this chance: so, without answering, she ran down the steps, and was almost whirled along the avenue by the wild wind that roared in the branches, tearing the leaves from the trees, and whirling them round and round. She hardly felt it—her whole soul was set upon the little orphan; the misery of watching the suffering she could not relieve, joined with passionate resentment at her father and sister-in-law, who she fancied made light of it. Only Mr. Fotheringham, when stopping at the lodge on his way, had shown what she thought tolerable humanity. He had shared her concern, consoled her despair, suggested asking counsel of Mrs. Martindale, and finally rode off five miles to Whitford in quest of the doctor.

Violet's advice proved not to be despicable; the measures she recommended relieved the little one, and by the time Percy and the apothecary made their appearance, it was asleep on Theodora's lap, and Mr. Legh pronounced that it was in a fair way to do well. She wished she could have watched it all night, but it was late, and Mr. Fotheringham stood waiting at the door. So she laid it in the cradle, gave her directions to the old woman who had charge of it, and resumed her brown cloak and hood, in which she walked about in all weathers, without umbrella, for which, as for parasols, she had a supreme aversion.

Mr. Legh wished to prevail on her to let him drive her home, but she would not hear of it. Percy put up his umbrella, and offered to shelter her, but she held aloof.

"No, no. Where did you get that elegant cotton machine?"

"I borrowed it at the turnpike."

"And rode home with it on Arthur's mare?"

"Of course I did. I was not going to get wet through."

"But how did you get her to let you carry it. She objects to his taking out his handkerchief."

"I am not going to be beaten by a mare, and she soon found that out."

"What have you done with her?"

"I took her home, and came back again. I wonder what Arthur will say to me for taking his gallant gray on to Whitford. I must get up a pathetic appeal to the feelings of a father!"

"Well, I did not recollect you had the gray, or I would have told you to take my horse. However, there 's no harm done, and it saved time."

"Whoo—h!" as the gust came roaring down furiously upon them, pelting fiercely with rain, flapping and tearing at Theodora's cloak, like the wind in the fable, trying to whirl her off her feet, and making vehement efforts to wrench the umbrella out of Percy's hand. A buffet with wind and weather was a frolic which she particularly enjoyed, running on before the blast, then turning round to walk backwards and recover breath to laugh at him toiling with the umbrella. Never had she looked brighter, her dark eyes lately so sad and soft, now sparkling and dancing with mirth, her brown cheek glowing with fresh red from the rain and wind that had loosened her hair, and was sporting with a long black tress that streamed beyond her bonnet, and fluttered over her face — life, strength, and activity in every limb, and her countenance beaming with sportiveness and gaiety, the more charming because so uncommon. It was a rare chance to catch Theodora at play.

"Ha! you 'll be beat! You will have to shut up the miserable invention unknown to our forefathers."

"Not I. I shall not give up the distinction between man and beast in the rain."

"Man! Why even ants carry parasols."

"That is in the sun. Parasols belong to an epoch of

earlier civilization. *Vide* Ninevite carvings — Persian satraps!"

"So you reduce yourself to a Persian satrap!"

"No; it was reserved for modern times to discover the true application of the umbrella. Were you rational enough to come back in the carriage?"

"No, indeed. To do justice to Violet, she would have come down in it, if I had not forgotten to tell her of it."

"I am glad you do her justice for once."

She would not answer, and took advantage of another combat with the wind to cover her silence.

"Theodora," said he, abruptly, "I cannot help it; I must say it!"

"Well?"

"I do not think you feel as you ought towards your brother's wife."

"John has told you this!"

"No; I have observed it. You had set your affections on Arthur; and thinking he had thrown himself away, you do not resist the common propensity to hate a sister-in-law."

"You like to provoke me," said Theodora; "but," and her voice trembled, "it is unkind to bring this up — the pain and grief of my life, when I was happy and forgetful for once."

"Far, far from unkindness. It is because I cannot bear to see you unhappy."

"I trusted no one saw that."

"I have known you too long, and thought of you too much, not to be grieved at the sight of your forced spirits and suppressed sorrow."

It would have angered her from another; from him it touched her to find how closely and kindly he had watched her. "I cannot help it," she said. "He was my all."

"Have you striven with it?"

"Of course I have. I have lived in a tumult of occupation, but —"

"But you have not conquered yourself, and grappled with the serpents that poison your life."

"Pray what do you call those serpents?"

"If you look them in the face, I believe you will find they are pride and jealousy."

"You like to find generic names," said Theodora, trying for a cold smile.

"Because it is safer to know and crush a venomous beast than to dally with it."

"If I find there are such serpents, I will crush them and thank you."

"No other woman would so have answered," cried Percy, exultingly.

"Because," said she, her throat swelling, "no other man is true and downright friend enough to warn me honestly."

"Theodora, Theodora, you are a grand creature, nearly thrown away for want of breaking in."

"Too true," said she, sadly.

"I must say it. Will you let me? Will you trust yourself and your happiness to me? It has been the vision and hope of my solitude to see you what you might be! the flaws in that noble nature corrected, its grandeur and devotedness shining forth undimmed. Together we would crush the serpents — bring out all that is excellent."

"I think there might be a chance for me with you," said she, in an odd sort of tone.

"You mean it?" he exclaimed, trying to see her face, but her hood flapped over it.

"I do. You appreciate me."

She let him walk beside her, and hold the umbrella over her; but not a word was spoken till they were ascending the steps, when she said, "Don't tell papa till night. I do not choose to look foolish."

"Good luck to thee, umbrella!" said Percy, holding it on high, ere closing it. "Thy sea-green dome has been a canopy of bliss. Honour to thy whalebones!" Then, in

a very different manner, "Oh! Theodora, could you but guess how you have mingled in every scheme or wish of mine; how often I have laughed myself to scorn for dreaming, as if there could be any chance!"

"Ah! what an uproar my aunt will make!" exclaimed Theodora, somewhat exultingly. Some one crossed the hall, and she ran away, but stept back from the foot of the stairs, laid her hand on his arm, and with a face inexpressibly sweet and brilliant, said, "We shall get on very well together. We need have no nonsense. But I did not know how happy you had made me."

She escaped again; she would not have said thus much if she had not known there could be no reply, for Lady Martindale was sailing down the grand staircase.

She met him no more till dinner, when he was silent, and she talkative and flighty, so that Violet suspected there had been a quarrel.

The next morning, the first tidings were that John had a cold and was confined to his bed by cough and pain in the chest; while something too was said of his having been kept up late at night talking. Theodora paid a visit to the sick child in the early morning, and after breakfast accompanied Violet to the lodge, where Violet found the poor little thing nursed with more goodwill than skill by its old aunt and Theodora, took it into her own motherly arms, gave it food and medicine, and hushed it to sleep so successfully, that Theodora respected what she called the feminine element.

The two sisters walked back happily together; but at the door Lord Martindale met them, exclaiming, "Where have you been, Theodora? Come here."

Violet wished to be certified that John was not worse, but could find no one but Mr. Fotheringham, who, with a little twist of the corner of his mouth, assured her that there was no cause for uneasiness on that account.

Some time had gone by; she was writing letters, while Percy stood in the deep window, reading the newspapers,

and making a great rustling with them. Suddenly Arthur entered, exclaiming:

"Well, Violet, here *is* a piece of news! Guess!"

"That is the way people always tell wedding news."

"Right. Now then for the victims."

"Your sister? What really? And who? Oh, not Lord St. Erme?"

"The very antipodes, as Harrison would say! Guess again."

"Help me, Mr. Fotheringham," she began; but Arthur, with a tremendous start, exclaimed, "Hollo! if that is not a shame! How I wish I had said what a shocking bad match it is?"

"You think so, do you?" said Percy, advancing, and heartily shaking Arthur's ready hand.

"Oh! that is your look-out," said Arthur, shrugging his shoulders.

"But, do you really mean it?" said Violet, looking from one to the other, as Percy's hand seemed to claim the same welcome from her.

"Indeed, I do," said Percy, earnestly.

"O, how glad John will be!" was her congratulation.

"So, I must say nothing about the gray," proceeded Arthur. "What is it some one says about Cupid's steeds? I vow I will call her Psyche, if it is only to make Theodora savage!"

"Where is your father?" said Percy.

"With John. That was where I heard it." Then, as Percy was leaving the room, "Well, you are a bold man! I hope you mean to kill the cat on the wedding-day. That is all."

"I am obliged for your experience," said Percy.

"If you make her like this one by the end of a year — "

"O, hush, Arthur!"

Percy hastened from the room. Violet could not recover from her astonishment. "Could Lord Martindale actually have consented?"

"Makes no difficulty at all. He has grown wiser since poor John's time. I have taught him one may be trusted to choose for one's self."

"But your aunt?"

"Ah! there is nothing she hates like a Fotheringham; but she has not the power over my father she once had. She will have to take up with us for very spite. But what they are to live on I do not know, unless my father keeps them."

"I thought he was heir to a baronetcy."

"Yes; but there is a half-witted son of old Sir Antony in the way, who will keep Percy out of the property for the term of his natural life, as well as if he was a wise man."

After luncheon, Violet had a message from John to ask for a visit from her. She found him on the sofa in the sitting-room, apparently oppressed and uncomfortable; but he looked brightened by her entrance, and pleased when she offered to stay and read to him.

"The very thing I have been figuring to myself as most agreeable. I don't want to talk or think. I have been over-doing both."

So she had to repress her curiosity, and give him the repose of her pleasant reading, till he dropped asleep; and after waiting some time, in the fear of awakening him, she gently left the room, and had time for another visit to the lodge, where she fell in with the lovers, and found them disputing about the cotton umbrella. Percy announced that he should give his own in exchange, and retain it for ever, as a trophy of what could be accomplished with both horse and woman. Theodora was a little cross. If he wished to keep it out of sentiment, that was all very well; but to give it the turn of glorying over her was displeasing. He wanted to make her confess that she had submitted to its shelter.

"No, you only walked by me, and held it up."

"I appeal to you, Mrs. Martindale. Is not that the popular view of being under an umbrella?"

Theodora would not speak, and Violet thought him wrong in teasing her. Silence ensued, but ended in his saying, as they came to the steps, "Well, Theodora, shall I restore the umbrella as a hated object?"

"No, no," said she; "do what you please with it, only don't talk nonsense about it." Then, when Violet was gone, — "You must not triumph over me, Percy; I cannot bear it. If it is pride, have patience with me."

"I should have asked you to forgive me," said Percy, affected by the tone of humility.

"No, no, indeed!" said Theodora, smiling; "but I warn you, my serpent is dealt with more safely by treading on it than by irritating it," and there was an indignant gleam in her dark eye. "Now I am going to tell my aunt."

"I would wish you well through it; but I believe you are eager for the battle. Only let me say one thing, Theodora — be forbearing, or you will be fostering the enemy."

"I can deal with her," said Theodora.

But she was met in a manner she had not expected. Mrs. Nesbit beckoned her to her side, laid her hand on hers, and peered up in her face with witch-like eyes, that disconcerted her usually ready speech, and called up a blush.

"I see," said Mrs. Nesbit. "I do not blame you for the fault of your father and brother. I knew how it would be."

"Has mamma told you?" said Theodora. "Papa promised that I should be the first to tell!"

"Your mamma does not know what will mortify her so extremely."

"Then how have you heard it?"

"I have seen it. I knew what you had to tell from the instant you entered. And your father has given you his consent?" raising her hand, as if to say "I give up all hopes of him."

"Yes, he highly approves."

Here Lady Martindale came into the room.

"You need not be vexed, my dear," began Mrs. Nesbit. "It will not be made public, and there will be no harm done."

"What will not, dear aunt? you alarm me."

"This foolish affair into which Lord Martindale and John have drawn this poor child."

"Aunt! aunt!" cried Theodora, "you do not know what you say. It is of my own free will — uninfluenced. I would choose him, and hold fast to him through words of opposition."

"Yes, yes; we understand all that," said Mrs. Nesbit, with a contemptuous accent; "but as it cannot be at once, you will soon have enough of that overbearing temper. At twenty, there is plenty of time to get over such an affair, and form a more suitable connexion."

"Never!" cried Theodora.

"What, my dear!" said astonished Lady Martindale. "You engaged, and you have not told me!"

"Only since yesterday, Mamma. He spoke to papa only this morning."

"But who is it? Nothing that your aunt disapproves, I trust, my dear."

"Percy Fotheringham," said Theodora, standing firm, and exulting in defiance; but her aunt continued that same provoking disregard.

"Yes, you see it is of no use to oppose her. For my part, I think her papa has acted wisely in permitting the engagement. Contradiction would embellish her hero; while, left to him, she will soon find him out. I do not concern myself, for Miss Martindale can get over a little matter of this kind."

"It is of no use to make protestations," said Theodora; and she left the room, much more annoyed than she could have been by the violent opposition for which she was prepared. Cool contempt was beyond everything irritating, especially where reply was impossible, and argument undignified.

Mrs. Nesbit continued to behave as if the engagement did not exist, and Violet could not suppose her informed of it. Lady Martindale looked melancholy and distressed, especially after having been with John, whom, however, she

declared to be better, and desirous of seeing his sister. Theodora went to him, but remained a very short time.

Violet ventured in with his mother, to wish him good night, and he thanked her warmly for having read him to sleep. "When I am laid up again, you will know where to find a nurse for me," added he to his mother; a speech which obtained for Violet a positively cordial and affectionate good night from Lady Martindale.

Though mending, he did not leave his room the next day, as it was damp and chilly; and he again asked for Violet's company in the afternoon, since he supposed she was not thinking of going out.

"O, no; no one does, except Theodora. I saw something brown half way across the park, which must be either her cloak, or the old cow-man's worst round frock."

"And Percy not in attendance?"

"No; he and Arthur are lingering at luncheon, talking about the Austrian army. When did you hear about this?"

"As soon as I came in. He marched into my room, sat down, and said, 'There! I 've done it.' I thought he had broken the knees of Arthur's gray, till he explained — 'No; I have taken your sister on my hands.'"

"So you were watching them all the evening!"

"Yes; I was very anxious as to how my father might view it."

"I suppose that hurt you more than the rain?"

"Excitement, as Brown would say. Perhaps it might. We talked long and late, and afterwards I fell into the old strain of thought. From what Percy tells me, his sister must have influenced Theodora far more than I thought possible. To her he ascribes her religious tone. If he is right, my mistake in neglecting her has been worse than I supposed."

"Then this is all the better! Do you remember saying you despaired of a Petruchio?"

"It is on the Petruchio principle that he takes her, and

avowedly. None but Katharina was ever so wooed or so won!"

"That is very much to her honour."

"If she realizes his being in earnest. She would make one doubt whether she has any earnest. Yesterday evening she so treated the subject that I was on the point of saying, 'Reply not to me with a fool-born jest.' And how do you think she answered my father, when he asked her if she knew what she undertook? As my namesake said, 'I shall wash all day and ride out on the great dog at night.'"

"Was not that a sort of shyness?"

"I would fain hope so. If I had ever seen anything like deep earnest feeling, I should be satisfied. Yet Percy declares, I trust he may be right, that she has the very strongest affections, and much tenderness of character. He says her nature came straight from the tropics, and must not be judged by sober English rules."

"If you had seen her distress about the child at the lodge!"

"Ah! he said those tears settled the matter, and showed him that she had the woman's heart as well as the candour that would conquer her waywardness. It sounds a little too like a lover's self-justification."

"Do you think so?" said Violet. "You do not know what she is with the dumb boy, and with Johnnie."

"I was just going to have instanced her neglect of Johnnie."

"I assure you," cried Violet, eagerly, "that is only because she does not like me. You cannot think how fond she is of him. When I am out of the way, she goes to the nursery and pets him till Sarah is almost jealous of his fondness for her."

"I have no patience with her," exclaimed John.

"I thought you would have been glad."

"I do not like Percy to make a mistake, and get his feelings trifled with. He deserves a wife like himself."

"Did you hear of Arthur's advice to him?"

"To kill the cat on the wedding-day. That might answer if it were to be at once; but it is a cat with nine lives, and I do not think she will bear to have it killed before the wedding-day."

"Then it is not to be soon?"

"No, my father thinks her not fit for a poor man's wife, and cannot give her more than 5000*l.*, so they must wait till they can begin on an income equal to yours."

"And I suppose that will be when he gets some appointment."

"And there is the Worthbourne estate as a provision for the future, so that there is no imprudence. For my part, I regret the delay; Theodora would shine if she had to rough it, provided always she was truly attached to her husband."

"She would bear poverty beautifully."

"But it is not a thing to advise. I am accused already of being romantic and imprudent, yet I would urge it on my father if I saw them desirous to hasten it. I do not understand them, and perhaps I am unreasonable. I do not like his happiness to be in such perverse hands, yet I am uneasy at the delay. It suits my aunt's predictions, and they are far too apt to come true. I feel them like a spell. She always foretold that Helen and I should never marry. And it cannot be denied that she has great insight into character, so that I am alarmed at her declaring this will not come to good. If not, I have no hope for Theodora! She will either be hard and unfeminine, or turn to wordliness, and be such another as my aunt. She has it in her!"

"You are taking to horrid predictions yourself."

"Well, I acknowledge her capabilities, but there has been woful mismanagement, and my father feels it."

"I was surprised at his consenting so readily."

"He has once been too much grieved to be led to act against his own judgment again. He thinks very highly of Percy, and is glad Theodora should be in safe keeping; she was so wilful this last season in London as to make him very uneasy."

Mr. Fotheringham came in, and Violet was going, but was claimed for some more work upon the *Crusaders*, and told that Arthur was gone out to inspect his gray.

Arthur found the weather better than it appeared from indoors, and strolled into the park to indulge in a cigar. Ere long he perceived the brown waterproof cloak, and throwing away the end of his cigar, called out, "Halloa! a solitary ramble. Have you given Earl Percy the slip?"

"You do not expect him to be always philandering after me?"

"There 's a popular delusion with regard to lovers."

"We are not such ninnies."

"But seriously, Theodora, what can induce Fotheringham to have you?"

"I expected you to ask what induced me to have him."

"That in its own time! Tell me, first, why he takes you."

"The same reason that you took Violet."

"As if you and Violet were to be named together!"

"Or you and Percy!"

They laughed, and Theodora then spoke with deep feeling. "It does surprise me, Arthur, but it is the more pleasure. He has known me all my life, and sees there is less humbug in me than in other women. He knows I have a heart."

"That scientific discovery is his reason. Now for yours."

"Because he understands me."

"So your partnership is founded on a stock of mutual understanding! I devoutly hope it is; for my notion is that Percy will stand no nonsense."

"Of course not."

"It remains to be proved how you will like that."

"I am not given to nonsense."

Arthur whistled.

"That means that I will not yield when I am not convinced."

"And he will make you."

"He will never be unreasonable," exclaimed Theodora.

"It does not follow that you will not."

"That is unjust. I yield where duty, good sense, or affection make it needful."

"Oho! Affection! That is like other people. Now I see some hope of you."

"Did you think I would have had him without it?"

"Certainly, it is the only explanation. You will not find being wife to a scrub of an attaché the same thing as being Miss Martindale."

"I am glad of it. My mind revolts at the hollowness of my present life."

"Well done!" ejaculated Arthur.

"I do," said Theodora, vehemently. "Ours has never been a home; it was all artificial, and we had separate worlds. You and I amalgamated best; but, oh! Arthur, you never cared for me as I did for you. The misery of my life has been want of affection. Any one who loved me could have guided me at will. You doubt! You don't know what is in me! How I felt as if I would work night and day at my lessons, if they were ever to be heard by mamma! I remember once, after a day's naughtiness, lying awake, sobbing, and saying, again and again, half alould, 'I would be good if they would love me!'"

"No one would have thought such fancies were in a wild colt like you."

"I would not have had them guessed for worlds. Then came that one gleam of Helen. It was a new life; but it could not last. She went back, and I cannot say things in letters. She told me to talk to John, but he was of no use. He has always despised me."

"I don't think you are right there."

"He would help me in trouble, but I am nothing to him. You were all I had, and when you gave yourself away from me I was left alone with the heart-ache, and began to think myself born to live without love."

"In spite of the lovers you had in London?"

"You know better. That was the Honourable Miss Martindale. What did they know of the real Theodora?"

"Poor critturs, what indeed? They would have run far enough if they had."

"I knew it. It is the soft, gentle, feminine mould that attracts men."

"Another curious discovery."

"I cannot change my nature. But when he comes, superior to them all, understanding my true self, seeing me high spirited and cold mannered, but able to look into me, and perceive there is warmth and soundness — oh! is not that a new well-spring of happiness!"

"Yes, he is as much out of the common run of folks as you are. You 'll go as well together as Smithson's pair of piebalds. I am satisfied; I only wanted to know whether you cared for him, for you don't '*act as sich.*'"

"I can't talk stuff. I managed pretty well with papa, but I could not bear it with John. He began to praise Percy, which made me ready to cry, and that provoked me: besides, I know he does not believe in me. He cares for Helen's brother far more than for his own sister, and does not think me good enough for him. I saw he thought I should trifle, and meant to give me a lecture; and I could not stand that, you know, so I got away as fast as I could."

"John does not lecture as you might expect, if you give him his full swing. He is the best and kindest fellow in the world."

"I know how Percy looks up to him. The only thing I don't like is, that I believe one cause of Percy's attachment is my being his sister."

"I tell you, Theodora, if you are so outrageously jealous, you will never get through the world in peace."

"I shall have no reason for jealousy."

"And for fear he should, had you not better give a hint to Wingfield? You are turning the poor fellow's head with your confabulations over the dirty children, and you 'll have him languishing in an unrequited attachment."

"He understands me too well," said Theodora.

"You reckon a great deal on understanding! And you put yourselves to the test. Why don't you marry out of hand, and trust to the fates?"

"We have talked it over," said Theodora. "As to our income being equal to yours, that is nonsense. We have no expensive habits; but Percy says 450*l.* a-year is too little, so we shall wait for the appointment, or till he has made it up to 700*l.* But I own I did not expect such ready consent from papa."

"Ha! You would have liked a little opposition? You would sing a different song if he had set his face against it. It is very knowing of my aunt to take the line she does."

"I wish my aunt was twenty years younger!"

"That you might fight it out, eh?"

"One comfort is, she will never leave me her money now! But I must go in, and send Miss Piper for a walk with Harrison. My aunt must be repaying herself on her."

"Then I shall take another cigar, to get the damp out of my throat."

"You wretch, you like to boast of it!"

"Ah! you don't know what Percy learnt in Turkey."

"I know he always abominated smoking."

"Perhaps he'll let you think so till you are married."

"For shame, Arthur! That's the way you served your wife."

"Not I. She is duly grateful to me for only smoking at fit times and places, wherein I don't resemble her precious brother."

Arthur thus reported this conversation to his wife. "I met Theodora in the park. She is as remarkable an article as ever I saw."

"What do you think? — is she really attached to him?"

"I know as little as she does."

It was determined that the secret should be strictly kept; it was the one point on which Lady Martindale was anxious, being thereto prompted by her aunt. Theodora declared

she had no one to tell, and Mr. Fotheringham only desired to inform his uncle and aunt, Sir Antony and Lady Fotheringham. He was now going to pay them a visit before settling in his lodgings in London. Theodora's engagement certainly made her afford to be kinder to Violet, or else it was Percy's influence that in some degree softened her. She was pleased at having one of her favourite head girls taken as housemaid under Sarah's direction, her only doubt being whether Violet was a sufficiently good mistress; but she had much confidence in Sarah, whose love of dominion made her glad of a young assistant.

The party was now breaking up, Violet in high spirits at returning home, and having Arthur all to herself, as well as eager to put her schemes of good management into practice. The sorrow was the parting with John, who was likely to be absent for several years.

Before going he had one last conversation with his sister, apropos to some mention of a book which she wished to send to London to be returned to Miss Gardner.

"Does Violet visit her?" he asked.

"There have been a few calls; Jane Gardner has been very good-natured to her."

"Is that cousin of theirs, that Gardner, still abroad?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"I hope he will stay there. He used to have a most baneful influence over Arthur. Theodora, if by any chance it should be in your power, you ought to do your utmost to keep them from coming in contact. It may be a very superfluous fear, but your intimacy with those ladies might be the means of bringing them together, and there is nothing I should so much dread."

"Surely, Arthur may be trusted to choose his own friends."

"You don't know what happened in their school days! No, you were too young. It was discovered that there was a practice of gambling and drinking wine in the boys' rooms, and Arthur was all but expelled; but it turned out that he

had been only weak, and entirely led by this fellow; and so he was spared. Percy could tell you many histories of Gardner's doings at Cambridge. Arthur's worst scrape since he has been in the Guards was entirely owing to him, and it was evident he still had the same power over him."

"Arthur is no boy now."

"I doubt," said John, half smiling.

"No one can make the least charge against him since his marriage."

"It has done much for him," answered John, "and she has improved wonderfully. Theodora, now that I am going away, let me once more tell you that you are throwing away a source of much happiness by disregarding her."

"Her romantic friendship with Emma Brandon is a proof that she cannot have much in common with me."

"There is one thing you have not in common with either," exclaimed John, "and that is an unassuming temper."

"Yes, I know you all think me prejudiced. I do not want you to go away misunderstanding me," answered Theodora. "She has good principles, she is amiable and affectionate, but there are three points that prevent me from esteeming her as you do. She has a weak fretful temper."

"I am sure you have seen no sign of it."

"It is just what is never shown; but I am convinced poor Arthur suffers from it. Next, she thinks a great deal of her appearance; and, lastly, she is fond of power, and tries to govern, if not by coaxing, by weakness, tears, hysterics — all the artillery of the feeble. Now, a woman such as that I can pity, but cannot love, nor think a fit wife for my brother."

"I can't tell, I don't know," said John, hesitating in displeasure and perplexity; "but this once I must try whether it is of any use to talk to you. Her spirits and nerves are not strong, and they were cruelly tried last spring; but Arthur only saw her cheerful, and never guessed at the tears she shed in secret, till we found her papers blistered with them,

when her never complaining and letting him go his own way had almost cost her her life! and if you knew her, you would see that the tendency to over-anxiety is the very failing with which she struggles. I wish I could make you see her in her true light."

"I cannot help it, John," said Theodora, "I must speak the truth. I see how it is. Men are not clear-sighted in judging of a pretty woman of engaging manners. They are under a fascination. I don't blame you — it is exactly the same with papa and Percy."

"Indeed?"

And for the last time baffled, John parted with his sister in much anxiety and disappointment, such as made it repose to turn to that other gentle, open-hearted, confiding sister, whose helplessness and sympathy had first roused him from despondency and inaction.

He begged her to write to him; an honour and a pleasure indeed, and now there was no fear of her letters being such as that she had sent him at Martindale. He declared the correspondence would be a great pleasure to him — he could not bear to think of hearing of those in whom he took so much interest only at second-hand; and besides, he had been accustomed to pour out his mind so much in his letters to Helen, that he felt the want of full and free confidence. His letters to his mother were not safe from the eye of his aunt, and neither his father nor Mr. Fotheringham could be what a lady correspondent would be to a man of his character, reflective, fond of description, and prone to dwell on the details of what interested him.

So the time of his departure came, whereat Arthur lamented, vowing it was a horrid bore that he could not live in England, and hoping that Barbuda would patch him up for good; while Violet made arrangements for his convenience and pleasure on the voyage, such as no sister had ever supplied for him before.

CHAPTER XI.

She so had prayed, and He who hears,
Through Seraph songs the sound of tears,
From that beloved babe had ta'en
The fever and the beating pain,
And more and more smiled Isobel
To see the baby sleep so well.
E. B. Browning (*Isobel's Child*).

On a bright cold afternoon the next spring, Theodora was setting out for a walk, when she saw a carriage driving up the avenue, and Arthur emerging from it. Joyously she sprang forward — "Arthur! Arthur! this is pleasant. How glad I am. This is like old times."

"Ay, I thought you would be ready for me. I have had a cold, and I am come home to shake off the end of it."

"A cold — not a bad one, I hope?"

"Not very. I wanted Violet to come, too, but the boy is poorly."

"Oh! I hope there is not much the matter."

"Only teeth, I believe. He is desperately fretful, and she can't attend to anything else."

"Well, I hope you are come for a good long visit."

"I can stay a week."

"That 's right, it will do you good. I was just going to write to you. I have a great mind to go back with you, if I shall not be in the way."

"Not at all. It will be famous having you; but what makes you come? To gratify Fotheringham?"

"I have many reasons. I 've got Charlie Layton elected to the Deaf and Dumb Asylum, and I must take him there."

"I'm not going to take him! 'T is enough to have to carry about one's own babies, without other people's."

"We 'll settle that," said Theodora. "Will you walk with me? There is no one at home, and I am stupefied with reading French novels to my aunt. Such horrid things! She has lost her taste for the natural, and likes only the extravagant. I have been at it ever since luncheon, and at

last, when the wretches had all charcoaled themselves to death, I came out to breathe fresh air and purity."

"Where's the Piper?"

"Piper no longer. Have you not heard?"

"Not a word since Percy announced that my aunt and Harrison had come to a split about the orchids."

"You have great things to hear. Harrison got a magnificent appointment, as he calls it — situation is not grand enough — to some botanic gardens, splendid salary. Nothing hindered the wedding but Miss Piper's dread of my aunt. It was not only that she could not tell her, but she could not face her after it was told, though I offered to undertake that. So the upshot was, that for very cowardice she preferred stealing the match and taking French leave. It was a silly piece of business, but I could not help that, and they were accountable to no one. I promised to announce it to my aunt when the deed was done, and satisfied the poor little woman's conscience by undertaking to be my aunt's white nigger till she bought another."

"If that's not self-devotion, I don't know what is," said Arthur. "I trust she has got one."

"She comes to-morrow."

"How was the wedding managed?"

"Harrison came with his license from Whitford, and I walked forth with sal volatile in one hand and salts in the other, administering them by turns to the fainting bride. I dragged her all the way by main strength, supported her through the service, and was very near giving her away by mistake, for there was no one else to do it but old Brand. He and I are the witnesses in the register. I received her hysterical farewells, and Harrison's elegant acknowledgments; saw them into their fly, and came home, trusting to Providence that I could inform my aunt without bringing on a fit."

"After surviving the news of your engagement she may bear anything."

"Ah! there she takes refuge in incredulity. Now this

was a fact. So there was nothing for it but to take a high tone. I gave the history, and told my own share; then, in the style of Richard II., when Wat Tyler was killed, declared I would be her companion; and after some bandying of words, we settled down peaceably."

"One thing amazes me. How did you get Wingfield to do it? I had plague enough with the old parson at Wrangerton, and I should have thought Wingfield harder to manage."

"They had no consent to ask — no one could forbid the bans. He soon saw the rights of it," said Theodora, unable to prevent herself from blushing.

"You talked him over, eh?"

"Arthur, you are looking at me as if you wanted to put me out of countenance. Well, you shall hear the truth; it is safe with you, and no one else knows it. It is my chief reason for wishing to go to London."

"Ah ha!"

"Yes, you were right in warning me. He must needs think I worked in the parish for his sake; and one fine day, as I was walking home, he joined company, and before I knew where I was he was making me an offer."

"And learnt what disdain means, if he did not know before."

"No," said Theodora, gravely, and blushing deeply, "I recollected your warning, and saw that if there had not been something like encouragement he would not have forgotten the distance between us. This wedding had occasioned conferences; besides, Percy was exacting at Christmas, and I had rather tried to tease him. I thought, living close by, Mr. Wingfield must have known the state of the case, and that I need not be on my guard; so that, having so far taken him in, I thought it right to tell him I was afraid he had not been fairly used, for I had trusted to his knowing I was engaged. So we parted amicably; but it is a great bore, for he is much more cut up than I expected, poor man. He went from home the next Monday, and is but just come back,

looking disconsolate enough to set people wondering what is on his spirits, and avoids me, so as to show them. It would be the best possible thing for me to get out of the way till it is blown over, for I have no comfort in parish work. It has been a relief to be always shut up with my aunt, since that was a reason for not going into the village."

"Then you will stay till the family migration?"

"I don't think there will be any this year. Papa talks about bad times, and says the season in London is too expensive; and mamma was worried and tired last year, and did not enjoy it, so she will be glad to avoid it and stay with my aunt."

"And, you being no longer a subject for speculation, there's no object."

"Yes, I am glad to have ended that hateful consciousness."

"Well, Violet will do her best for you."

"I don't want her to trouble herself; I only want house-room."

"And a change after a month's white-niggering.

"That's another reason. My aunt has grown so dependent on me, that this new lady will not have a fair chance if I am at home; and if I don't break the habit, I shall never call my time my own again."

In fact, Theodora had been suffering under a fit of restlessness and dissatisfaction, which made her anxious to change the scene. The school, her great resource, was liable to be a place of awkward meetings. She was going to lose her dumb charge; and with Percy and Arthur both at a distance, there was no excitement nor relief to the tedium of home. The thorough self-sacrificing attendance on her aunt had been the sole means left her of maintaining the sense of fulfilling a duty.

The unexpected arrival of her favourite brother was as a reward. Her spirits rose, and she talked with gaiety and animation, delighted to find him claiming her company for walks and rides to be taken in his holiday week, and feeling

as if now the prediction had truly come to pass that he would be relieved to come to her from the annoyances of his home.

Every one seemed glad to see Arthur — even Mrs. Nesbit. In the course of the evening something was said about a dinner party for the ensuing Saturday, and Lady Martindale asked if he could stay for it.

"Saturday? Yes, I need not go back till Monday."

"I wish Violet could have come," said Lord Martindale. "I am glad you can give us a week, but it is a long time for her to be alone. I hope she has some friend to be with her."

"Oh, she wants no one," said Arthur. "She begged me to go; and I fancy she will be rather glad to have no distraction from the child. I am only in the way of her perpetual walking up and down the room with him whining in her arms."

"Ah! it is an unlucky affair," said Mrs. Nesbit, in her sarcastic tone of condolence; "she will never rear it."

She seemed, in her triumph, to have forgotten that its father was present, and his impatient speech had certainly not been such as to bring it to mind; but this was too much, and, starting, he hastily exclaimed, "Children always do make a fuss about their teeth!"

"I do not speak without the authority of medical men," said Mrs. Nesbit. "I don't blame your wife, poor thing."

"What do you mean?" cried Arthur, colour and voice both rising.

"I am surprised your brother kept it from you," said she, gratified at torturing him; "you ought to have been informed."

"Tell me at once!" said Arthur.

"Only this, Arthur," said his father, interposing: "when first the doctor at Ventnor saw him he thought him very delicate, and told John that he would hardly get through the first year without great care."

"He has all but done that!" said Arthur, breathing more freely; "he will be a year old on the third."

"Yes; afterwards the doctor thought much better of him, and John saw no occasion to make you and Violet more anxious."

"Then it all goes for nothing!" said Arthur, looking full at his aunt with defiance, and moving to the furthest end of the room.

But it did not go for nothing. He could not shake off the impression. The child's illness had never been so alarming as to stir up his feelings, though his comfort had been interfered with; and there were recollections of impatience that came painfully upon him. He knew that Violet thought him more indifferent to his child than he really was; and, though she had never uttered a complaint or reproach, he was sure that he had hurt and distressed her by displeasure at the crying, and by making light of the anxieties, which he now learnt were but too well founded.

Arthur's easiness and selfishness made him slow to take alarm, but when once awakened there was no limit to his anxiety. He knew now what it would be to lose his first-born. He thought of the moment when the babe had been laid on his hand, and of the sad hours when that feeble cry had been like a charm, holding the mother to life; and his heart smote him as he thought of never hearing again the voice of which he had complained. What might not be happening at that moment? As grisly a train of chances rose before him as ever had haunted Violet herself, and he thought of a worse return home than even his last. Yet he had never desired her to let him know whether all was well!

He could not sleep, and in the morning twilight he sought out writing materials, and indited his first letter to his wife: —

"Dear Violet, — I hope you and the boy are well. I have not coughed since I left London. I come home on

Monday, if all goes well, and Theodora with me. She has made the place too hot to hold her.

"Yours ever,

"A. N. MARTINDALE.

"P.S. Write and say how the boy is."

Having hunted up a servant, and sent him with this missive to the early post, Arthur's paternal conscience was satisfied, and, going to bed again, he slept till breakfast was half over, then good-humouredly listened to exclamations on his tardiness, and loitered about the rest of the morning, to the great pleasure of his sister.

The companion, Mrs. Garth, the highly recommended widow of a marine officer, arrived in the afternoon, and Arthur, meeting her on the stairs, pronounced that she was a forbidding-looking female, and there was no fear that she would not be able to hold her own.

Rejoicing in newly-recovered freedom, Theodora had a long ride with him; and having planned another to a village near a trout-stream, where he wanted to inquire about lodgings for his indefatigable fishing friend, Captain Fitzhugh, she was working hard to dispose of her daily avocations before breakfast the next day, when Arthur knocked at her door. "Good morning," he said, hastily. "I must go home. My little boy is very ill."

"Is he? What is it?"

"A bad fit of croup. He was better when the letter went. My poor Violet! She has called in further advice; but it may come back. Do you like to come with me?"

"If you like to have me."

"Only be quick. I must be gone by the ten o'clock train. You must be ready to start by nine."

"I 'll be ready at once," said Theodora, hastily ringing for Pauline, and rushing upon her preparations. She could not bear to part with him in his grief, and thought, in case of the child's severe illness or death, that he would be in need of her comfort when he had his wife on his hands. She

would not take Pauline — she would not be dependent, and trouble their small household with another servant; but Charles Layton she could not leave, and having given orders to pack up her things, she flew off down the avenue to desire his aunt to prepare him.

Up and down, backwards and forwards, giving directions to every one, she hurried about till her father summoned her to breakfast. "I am glad you are going with him, my dear," he said, as he went down the steps with her. "We shall depend on you for hearing of the little boy."

That genuine cordial approbation was so pleasant that the thought crossed her, "Was she going to be a blessing to her family?"

"Good by, Arthur," said Lord Martindale, warmly pressing his hand. "I hope you will find him better, and Violet not doing too much. Give my love to her."

Arthur was moved by his father's unwonted warmth, and leaned back in the carriage in silence. Theodora watched him anxiously, and did not speak for some time. "Had there been any tendency to croup before?" she asked at last.

"Tender throat, I believe; Violet always was anxious. I wish I had not come away; it is too much for her alone. Ha! what are we stopping for now?"

"To pick up Charles Layton."

"You 'll make us miss the train."

"No, here he is. He shall be in nobody's way. I 'll put him into the housemaid's charge in Belgrave-square." And with her eyes and fingers she encouraged the poor child as he was lifted up to the box. "There, I 've not stopped you long."

"What shall you do with him on the railroad?"

"Take him with us, of course."

"I won't have him going in a first-class with me."

"Then I shall go in a second-class with him."

Here it occurred to her that this was a strange way of fulfilling her mission of comfort, and she would fain have recalled her words, but only sat silent till they came to the

station, where without any further question, they were all three lodged in the same carriage, where presently a county neighbour entered, attracted by the sight of Arthur. Theodora was provoked, feeling for Arthur, and thinking it was the stranger's presence that hindered her from resuming the task of cheering him, but she was more annoyed when Arthur plunged into a hunting discussion.

She sat working up the scene which awaited them, the child just expiring, his mother in hysterical agonies, and she herself displaying all her energy and resources, perhaps saving Johnnie's life — at any rate, being her brother's stay and support when his wife gave way.

His silence and anxious looks returned as they drove from the station, and she could think of nothing to say but the old hope that the baby was better. As they stopped, he threw open the carriage-door, and springing out, impatiently rang. "Child better?" were his hurried words to James.

"Yes, Sir."

Before even this brief answer was spoken, Arthur was half-way up stairs. No one was in the drawing-room; he dashed up to the bed-room; that, too, was empty; he climbed on where he had never been before, and opened the nursery-door.

There sat Violet on a low chair by the fire, with the little boy on her lap. With a cry of joy she rose; and in another moment was standing, almost unable to speak, as she saw Johnnie, looking much surprised, but well-pleased, to find himself in those strong arms, and his soft face scrubbed by the black whiskers.

"He is pleased! He is smiling. You know papa, don't you, my Johnnie?" cried the happy Violet.

"And he is all right again?"

"So much better to-day! We trust the cold is gone. Does he not breathe softly and freely? If only there 's no return to-night."

"Was there last night?"

"Indeed there was. It was too dreadful!" said Violet, leaning against him, and lowering her voice. "Once Sarah and Mr. Harding both thought it was all over, and I never dared to expect to see those eyes come back to their own dear look at me! O, Arthur, when I thought if I could but once have seen him in your arms! I never thought to be so happy as this!" and she caressed the child to hide the tears of thankfulness. "I 'm glad you weren't there."

"My Violet, why?"

"You could not have borne to have seen and heard, and now you won't have it to remember. At least, I trust not! Think of their once wanting me to go away, saying it was not fit, and that I was of no use; but you knew better, Johnnie. You held mamma's finger tight, and when you came to yourself, your sweet look and smile were for her! And at last he went to sleep over my shoulder, as he likes best; and I felt each one of his breathings, but they grew soft and smooth at last, and after two good hours he woke up quite himself."

"And you! Sitting up all night! You are not fit for such things. How did you get through it?"

"I don't know; I hardly remember," said Violet. "Your letter was such a pleasure! and oh! I had help."

"What, Harding —"

"I did not mean that, though he was very kind. No, I meant thoughts — verses in the Bible," said Violet, hanging her head, and whispering, "I don't mean at the worst. Then one could only pray he might not suffer so much; but things his uncle had helped me to, did come so comfortably while he was asleep. Don't you remember saying I had no troubles for Helen's cross to comfort me in?"

"And did it?" said Arthur, half smiling.

"Not itself, you know; but it helped to put me in mind to be sure that all he was going through would somehow be a blessing. I could bear it then, and not be angry, as I was last year. Dear little fellow, it is as if he would put me in

mind himself, for the only thing like play he has done to-day has been holding it up, and pulling its chain."

"There! go to your mother, Johnnie," said Arthur, giving him back. "She is a rare one, I tell you, and you understand each other. He does not look much amiss either. He really is a very pretty little fellow!"

No wonder Arthur made the discovery, as he for the first time remarked the large wistful dark eyes, the delicately fair skin, which the heat of the fire had tinged with soft pink, on the cheeks, the shapely little head, with its flaxen waves of curl; and the tiny, bare, rosy feet, outstretched to enjoy the warmth. Very small, tender, and fragile, he looked, and his features had an almost mournful expression; but there was something peculiarly engaging in this frail little being.

Violet was charmed with the tribute of admiration; indeed, she had hardly known whether she might hope for Arthur's return, though she had felt as if her heart would break if her child should die without his coming. The winter, though cheerful, had been spent in endeavours against her want of faith and hope, and this hard trial in the spring had brought with it a comfort and beginning of resignation that proved that her efforts had not been in vain.

Very happy she was as, Sarah coming up, she prepared to go down with Arthur, who now remembered to inform her of the arrival of "Theodora and her dummy."

These two personages were waiting in the drawing-room, Theodora in an excited state of anticipation and energy, prepared for a summons to take the care of the baby, while Arthur was supporting his wife in hysterics.

Long she waited and listened; at last there was an opening of doors, then what she fancied the first shriek, and she started, alarmed, in spite of being wound up; but it sounded nearer — much too like a *bonâ fide* laugh, the very girlish sound she had condemned — Arthur's voice — Violet's gaily answering! They came in, full of smiles, Violet with outstretched hands, and warm unconstrained welcome.

"How kind of you to come! I'm sorry you have been so long alone, but I did not know it," said she, kissing her sister-in-law, and giving a kind silent greeting to the dumb boy.

Disconcerted at her waste of preparation, Theodora stood for a moment, fancying Violet triumphant in having spoilt Arthur's holiday by what must have been an exaggerated trifle. She was almost ready to make no inquiry for Johnnie, but "conventional instinct" prevailed, and his parents were so full of him, and of each other, that it set them off into an eager conversation, such as made her, in her present mood, believe herself neglected, for the sake of Arthur's weak, tyrannical, exacting idol. She resolved to take Charles at once to her father's house. If it would not have been an insult to her brother, she would have slept there herself. She surprised the others by rising from her seat, and taking up the boy's cap.

"Oh!" exclaimed Violet, "I had forgotten him, poor little fellow. I will take him to Susan to have some tea."

"Thank you, I am going to take him to the maid at our house."

"O, pray do not," said Violet, imploringly; "there's plenty of room here, and we can see about him so much better."

"I had rather," persisted Theodora.

"But see, it is getting dark. The lamps are lighted. You can't go now."

"I shall not lose my way," said Theodora, taking by the hand the poor boy, who seemed unwilling to leave the fire and Mrs. Martindale's kind looks.

"Now, Arthur! you won't let her go!" said Violet, distressed.

"What's the row?" said Arthur. "Setting out on your travels again, Theodora?"

"Only to take Charlie to Belgrave-square."

"I shan't come with you."

"I can go by myself."

"Nonsense. You have rattled the poor child about enough for one day. Stay at home like a rational woman, and Violet will see to him."

The dumb child gazed as if he read their faces, and was begging to remain; he gladly allowed Violet to take his hand, and she led him away, inviting Theodora to come and give her own directions about him to Susan, the girl from Brogden.

So sweet was the manner, so kind the welcome, and so pretty the solicitude for her comfort, that pride and prejudice had much difficulty in maintaining themselves. But Theodora thought that she did not like blandishments, and she was angry at the sensation of being in the inferior situation of Violet's guest, at a moment of its being so signally shown that she could not permit Arthur to enjoy himself without her. To get home again as fast as possible was her resolution, as she merely unpacked the articles for immediate use, and after a hasty toilette, returned to the drawing-room.

Arthur and Violet were in earnest conversation. She fancied herself an interruption, and did not second their attempts to make it general. Violet had received a letter from John, and was offering it to Arthur, who only yawned.

"Five sheets! He writes an abominably small hand! You may tell me what it is about. Niggers and humming-birds and such cattle, I suppose."

"He has been to see the bishop. He wants a chaplain to live in the house with him to teach the negroes, and have the church when it is built."

"No chance of his coming home, then?"

"No, he is so well and busy. Percy Fotheringham is to send out some plans for the church — and only think? he has told Percy to come and ask me about Mr. Fanshawe — don't you remember him?"

"The curate at the chapel at Wrangerton?"

"I once told John of his wish for missionary work, so Percy is to see about it, and if it will do, send him to Lord Martindale. Percy called yesterday, but I could not see

him; indeed, I had not time to read my letter; and oh, Theodora, I am so glad you are come, for he wants all manner of infant school pictures and books for the picaninnies, and it is just the commission you understand."

The hearing of John's letter read, so far from mollifying Theodora, renewed the other grievance. At home, it was only by chance that she heard of her eldest brother's plans, even when matured and submitted to his father; and she now found that they were discussed from the first with Violet, almost requiring her approval. The confidential ease and flow made it seem unlike John's composition, used as Theodora was to hear only such letters of his as would bear unfriendly inspection, entertaining, but like a book of travels. It was a fresh injury to discover that he had a style from his heart.

Theodora was in a mood to search for subjects of disapproval, but the cheerful rooms, and even the extemporized dinner, afforded her none; the only cause of irritation she could find was Arthur's anxiety when the lamplight revealed Violet's pale exhausted looks. She had forgotten her fatigue as long as there was anything to be done, and the delight of the arrival had driven it away; but it now became evident that Arthur was uneasy. Theodora was gloomy, and not responding to her languid attempts at conversation, thinking there was affectation in her worn-out plaintive voice.

As soon as the tedious dinner was over, Arthur insisted on her going at once to bed, without listening to her entreaties that, as it was Theodora's first evening, she might lie on the sofa and hear them talk. She turned back at the door to tell Theodora that there was a new review on the table, with something in it she would like to read, and then let Arthur take her upstairs.

"Ah!" thought Theodora, "tormenting him about the child does not suffice — she must be ill herself! It is even beyond what I expected. When she had brought him home, she might have let him have his evening in peace; but I suppose she is displeased at my coming, and won't let him stay

with me. She will keep him in attendance all the evening, so I may as well see what books she has got. *The West Indies; The Crusaders* — of course! *Geoffroi de Villehardouin* — Percy's name in it. Where's this review? Some puff, I suppose. Yes; now if I was a silly young lady, how much I should make of Percy because he has made a good hit, and is a literary lion; but he shall see the world makes no difference to me. I thought the book good in manuscript; and all the critics in the country won't make me think a bit better of it or of its author. However, I'll just see what nonsense they talk till she chooses to release Arthur."

What would have been her displeasure if she had known that Arthur was lingering upstairs giving his wife a ludicrous version of her adventure with Mr. Wingfield?

After a time the drawing-room door opened, but she did not heed it, meaning to be distant and indifferent; but a browner, harder hand than Arthur's was put down on the book before her, and an unexpected voice said, "Detected!"

"Percy! Oh, how are you?" she exclaimed.

"I am very glad you are come; I came to inquire at the door, and they told me that you were here. How is she, poor thing?"

"She is gone to bed; Arthur thinks her knocked up."

"It is well he is come; I was much concerned at her being alone yesterday. So little Johnnie is better?"

"Like Mother Hubbard's dog."

"The croup is no joke," said Percy, gravely.

"Then you think there was really something in it?"

"Why, what do you mean? Do you think it was humbug?"

"Not all; but it was such a terrific account, and alarmed poor Arthur so much, that it gave one rather a revulsion of feeling to hear her laughing."

"I am very glad she could laugh."

"Well, but don't you think, Percy, that innocently, perhaps, she magnified a little alarm?"

"You would not speak of little alarms if you had seen Harding this morning. I met him just coming away after a fearful night. The child was in the utmost danger; but his mother's calmness and presence of mind never failed. But I'll say no more, for the sound wholesome atmosphere of this house must cure you of your prejudices."

Arthur came down dispirited; and Percy, who had thought him an indifferent father, was pleased with him, and set himself to cheer his spirits, seconded by Theodora, who was really penitent.

"She could not be at peace with herself till she had made some amends; and when she had wished her brother good night, found her way to the nursery, where her old friend Sarah sat, keeping solemn watch over the little cot by the fire. One of her sepulchral whispers assured the aunt that he was doing nicely; but the thin white little face, and spare hand and arm, grieved Theodora's heart, and with no incredulity she listened to Sarah's description of the poor little fellow's troubles and sweet unconscious patience, and that perfect trust in his mother that always soothed and quieted him. It appeared that many nights had been spent in broken rest, and for the last two neither mother nor nurse had undressed. Sarah was extremely concerned for her mistress, who, she said, was far from strong, and she feared would be made as ill as she was last year, and if so, nothing could save her. This made Theodora feel as if she had been positively cruel, and she was the more bent on reparation. She told Sarah she must be overtired, and was told, as if it was a satisfactory answer, that Mrs. Martindale had wished her to go to bed at six this morning. However, her eyes looked extinguished, and Theodora, by the fascinating manner she often exercised with inferiors, at last persuaded her to lie down in her clothes, and leave her to keep watch.

It was comfortable to hear the deep breathings of the weary servant, and to sit by that little cot, sensible of being for once of substantial use, and meaning that no one ever should know it. But she was again disconcerted; for the

stairs creaked, the door was softly opened, and Arthur stood on the threshold. The colour mantled into her face, as if she had been doing wrong.

"The poor maid is worn out; I am come for the first part of the night," she said, in a would-be cold whisper. But his smile and low-toned "Thank you," were so different from all she had ever known from him, that she could hardly maintain her attempt at impassibility.

"I thought Violet would sleep better for the last news," said he, kneeling on one knee to look at the child, his face so softened and thoughtful that it was hardly like the same; but recovering, he gave a broad careless smile, together with a sigh: "Little monkey," he said, "he gets hold of one somehow — I wish he may have got through it. Theodora, I hope you will have no alarms. Violet will take it very kind of you."

"Oh, don't tell her."

"Good night," and he leaned over her and kissed her forehead, in a grave grateful way that brought the tears into her eyes as he silently departed.

Her vigil was full of thoughts, and not unprofitable ones. Her best feelings were stirred up, and she could not see Arthur, in this new light, without tenderness untainted by jealousy. Percy had brought her to a sense of her injustice — this was the small end of the wedge, and the discovery of the real state of things was another blow. While watching the placid sleep of the child, it was not easy to harden herself against its mother; and after that first relenting and acknowledgment, the flood of honest warm strong feeling was in a way to burst the barrier of haughtiness, and carry her on further than she by any means anticipated. The baby slept quietly, and the clock had struck two before his first turn on the pillow wakened Sarah, though a thunder-clap would not have broken her slumber. She was at his cradle before he had opened his eyes, and feeding and fondling hushed his weak cry before it had disturbed his mother. Theodora went to her room on good terms with herself.

She had never allowed late hours to prevent her from going to the early service, and as she left her room prepared for it, she met Violet coming out of the nursery. Theodora for once did not attempt to disguise her warmth of heart, and eagerly asked for the little boy.

"Quite comfortable — almost merry," answered Violet, and taking the hand stretched out in a very different way from the formal touch with which it usually paid its morning greeting, and raising her eyes with her gentle earnest look, she said, "Dear Theodora, I am afraid you don't like it, but you must let me this once thank you."

Theodora's face was such that Violet ventured to kiss her, then found an arm round her neck, and a warm kiss in return. Theodora ran down stairs, thinking it a discovery that there was more beauty in those eyes than merely soft brown colour and long black lashes.

It was a long time since her heart had been so light. It was as if a cold hard weight was removed. That one softening had been an inexpressible relief, and when she had thrown aside the black veil that had shrouded her view, everything looked so bright and sweet that she could hardly understand it.

The whole scene was new. She had been seldom from home, and only as a visitor in great houses, whither Lady Martindale carried formality; and she had never known the charm of ease in a small family. Here it would have been far more hard to support her cold solitary dignity than in the "high baronial pride" of Martindale. She was pleased to see how well Arthur looked as master of the house, and both he and his wife were so much delighted to make her welcome now that she would allow them, that it seemed extraordinary that a year and three quarters had passed without her ever having entered their house. Violet was, she owned, a caressing, amiable, loveable creature, needing to be guarded and petted, and she laid herself open to the pleasure of having something to make much of and patronise.

After breakfast, Violet installed her in the back drawing-

room, promising that she should there be entirely free from interruption, but she had no desire to shut herself up; she was eager to see little Johnnie, and did not scruple to confess it. He was their chief bond of union, and if she was charmed with him now, when feeble and ailing, how much more as he recovered. Even at his best, he was extremely delicate, very small, thin, and fair, so that face and arms, as well as flaxen hair, were all as white as his frock, and were only enlivened by his dark eyes. He was backward in strength, but almost too forward in intelligence; grave and serious, seldom laughing, and often inclined to be fretful, altogether requiring the most anxious care, but exceedingly engaging and affectionate, and already showing patience and obedience to his mother that was almost affecting. Their mutual fondness was beautiful, and Theodora honoured it when she saw that the tenderness was judicious, obviating whines, but enforcing obedience even when it was pain and grief to cross the weakly child.

Moreover, Theodora was satisfied by finding that she had diligently kept up the Sunday-school teaching of the little Brogden maid; and as to her household management, Theodora set herself to learn it; and soon began to theorize and devise grand plans of economy, which she wanted Violet to put in practice at once, and when told they would not suit Arthur, complacently answered, "that would not be her hindrance."

Violet wrote to John that if he could see Theodora and Percy now, he would be completely satisfied as to their attachment and chances of happiness.

CHAPTER XII.

I saw her hold Earl Percy at the point
With lustier maintenance than I did look for
Of such an ungrown warrior.

King Henry IV.

As soon as Violet could leave her little boy without anxiety, the two sisters deposited Charles Layton at the

Deaf and Dumb Asylum, with hopes that a few years' training there would enable him to become Miss Martindale's little page, the grand object of his desires.

Their next and merriest excursion was to Percy's lodgings, where he had various Greek curiosities which he wished to show them, and Theodora consented to come with her brother and sister in a simple straight-forward way that Violet admired.

His rooms were over a toy-shop in Piccadilly, in such a roar of sounds that the ladies exclaimed, and Arthur asked him how much he paid for noise.

"It is worth having," said Percy; "it is cheerful."

"Do you think so?" exclaimed Violet. "I think carriages, especially late at night, make a most dismal dreary sound."

"They remind me of an essay of Miss Talbot's where she speaks of her companions hastening home from the feast of empty shells," said Theodora.

"Ay! those are your West-end carriages," said Percy; "I will allow them a dreary dissatisfied sound. Now mine are honest business-like market-waggons, or hearty tradesfolk coming home in cabs from treating their children to the play. There is sense in those! I go to sleep thinking what drops of various natures make up the roar of that great human cataract, and wake up dreaming of the Rhine falls.

'Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide,
And a river flows down the vale of Cheapside,'

Eh, Mrs. Martindale?"

Violet, who always received a quotation of Wordsworth as a compliment to the north, smiled and answered, "I am afraid with me it would end in

'The stream will not flow, and the hill will not rise.'"

"Pish, Violet," said her husband; "how can you expect to feel like poets and lovers? And halloo! he is coming it strong. *Poems by* Λ, *The White Hind*, and other poems; *Gwyneth:* a tale in verse; *Farewell to Pausilippo*, by the Earl

of St. Erme! Well done, Percy! Are you collecting original serenades for Theodora? I 'll never betray where they came from."

"It is all in the way of trade," said Percy.

"Reviewing?" said Theodora.

"Yes; there has been such an absurd amount of flattery bestowed on them, that it must provoke any reasonable being. It really is time to put forth a little common sense, since the magazines will have it that earls write better than other people."

"Some of the verses in Lord St. Erme's last volume seem to me very pretty," said Violet.

"There, she is taking up the cudgels for her countryman," said Arthur, always pleased when she put herself forward.

"Which do you mean?" said Percy, turning on her incredulously.

"I like those about the Bay of Naples," she answered.

"You do not mean these?" and he read them in so good-humoured a tone that no one could be vexed, but marking every inconsistent simile and word tortured out of its meaning, and throwing in notes and comments on the unfaithfulness of the description.

"There! it would do as well for the Bay of Naples as for the farm-yard at Martindale — all water and smoke."

Arthur and Theodora laughed, but Violet stood her ground, blushingly but resolutely.

"Anything so read would sound ill," she said. "I dare say it is all right about the faults, but some parts seem to me very pretty. This stanza, about the fishermen's boats at night, like sparks upon the water, is one I like, because it is what John once described to me."

"You are right, Mrs. Martindale," said Percy, reading a second time the lines to which she alluded. "They do recall the evening scene; Mount Vesuvius and its brooding cloud, and the trails of phosphoric light upon the sea. I mark these

for approval. But have you anything to say for this Address to the Mediterranean?"

He did not this time mar the poem in the reading, and it was not needed, the compound words and twisted epithets were so extravagant that no one gainsaid Arthur's sentence, "Stilts and bladders!"

"And all that abuse of the savage north is unpardonable," said Theodora. "Sluggish torpid minds, indeed, frozen by skies bound in mist belts! If he would stay at home and mind his own business, he would not have time to talk such nonsense!"

"Now," said the still undaunted Violet, when the torrent of unsparing jest had expended itself, "now it is my turn. Let me show you one short piece. This — *To L.*"

It was an address evidently to his orphan sister, very beautiful and simple; and speaking so touchingly of their loneliness together and dependence on each other, that Mr. Fotheringham was overcome, and fairly broke down in the reading; to the dismay of Violet, who had little thought his feelings so easily excited.

"Think of the man going and publishing it," said Theodora. "If I was Lady Lucy, I should not care a rush for it now."

"That is what you get by belonging to a poet," said Arthur. "He wears his heart outside."

"This came straight from the heart, at least," said Percy. "It is good, very good. I am glad you showed it to me. It would never do not to be candid. I will turn him over again."

"Well done, councillor!" cried Arthur. "She has gained a verdict for him!"

"Modified the sentence, and given me some re-writing to do," said Percy. "I cannot let him off; the more good there is in him, the more it is incumbent on some one to slash him. Authors are like spaniels, et cetera."

"Hear, hear, Theodora!" cried Arthur. "See there, he has the stick ready, I declare."

For in truth Arthur would hardly have been so patient of hearing so much poetry if it had not been for the delight he always took in seeing his wife's opinion sought by a clever man, and he was glad to turn for amusement to Percy's curiosities. Over the mantelpiece there was a sort of trophy in imitation of the title-page to *Robinson Crusoe*, a thick, hooked stick set up saltire-wise with the green umbrella, and between them a yataghan, supporting a scarlet, blue-tasselled Greek cap. Percy took down the stick, and gave it into Theodora's hand, saying, "It has been my companion over half Europe and Asia; I cut it at —"

"By the well of St. Keyne?" suggested the malicious brother.

"No, at the source of the Scamander," said Percy. "It served us in good stead when we got into the desert of Engaddi."

"Oh! was that when the robbers broke into John's tent?" exclaimed Violet. "Surely you had some better weapon?"

"Not I; the poor rogues were not worth wasting good powder on, and a good English drubbing was a much newer and more effective experiment. I was thenceforth known by the name of Grandfather of Clubs, and Brown always manœuvred me into sleeping across the entrance of the tent. I do believe we should have left him entombed in the desert sands, if John's dressing-case had been lost!"

"What a capital likeness of John," said Theodora. "Mamma would be quite jealous of it."

"It belonged to my sister," said Percy. "He got it done by an Italian, who has made him rather theatrically melancholy; but it is a good picture, and like John when he looked more young-mannish and sentimental than he does now."

A hiss and cluck made Violet start. In a dark corner, shrouded by the curtain, sat Pallas Athene, the owl of the Parthenon, winking at the light, and testifying great disapproval of Arthur; though when her master took her on his finger she drew herself up and elevated her pretty little feathery horns with satisfaction, and did not even object to

his holding her to a great tabby cat belonging to the landlady, but which was most at home on the hearth-rug of the good-natured lodger.

"I always read my compositions to them," said Percy. "Pallas acts sapient judge to admiration, and Puss never commits herself, applauding only her own music — like other critics. We reserve our hisses for others."

"How do you feed the owl, Percy?"

"A small boy provides her with sparrows and mice for sixpence a dozen. I doubted whether it was cruelty to animals, but decided that it was diverting the spirit of the chase to objects more legitimate than pocket-handkerchiefs."

"Ho! so there you seek your *protégés!*"

"He sought me. I seized him fishing in my pocket. I found he had no belongings, and that his most commodious lodging-house was one of the huge worn-out boilers near Nine-Elms — an illustration for Watts' Hymns, Theodora."

"Poor little creature!" said Violet, horrified. "What will become of him?"

"He is doing justice to the patronage of the goddess of wisdom," said Percy. "He is as sharp as a needle, and gets on in the world — has discarded 'conveying,' and promoted himself to selling lucifers."

"A happy family theirs will be," said Arthur. "Cat, owl, and two rival pages!"

So, having duly admired all, curious books, potteries, red and black, tiles and lachrymatories, coins, scraps of ancient armour, a stuffed bee-eater, and the bottled remains of a green lizard that had been a pet at Constantinople—and having been instructed in the difference between various Eastern modes of writing — the merry visit closed; and as the two sisters went home they planned a suit of clothes for the owl's provider, Theodora stipulating for all the hard and unusual needle-work.

CHAPTER XIII.

I am ashamed that women are so simple
To offer war when they should kneel for peace,
Or seek the rule, supremacy, and sway,
When they are bound to serve, love, and obey.
Taming of the Shrew.

It was an early season, and Theodora had not been a fortnight at her brother's before numerous arrivals necessitated a round of visits, to which she submitted without more than moderate grumbling. The first call was on the Rickworth ladies; but it was not a propitious moment, for other visitors were in the drawing-room, and among them Miss Marstone. Emma came to sit by Violet, and was very anxious to hear whether she had not become intimate with Theresa. Violet could not give a good account of herself in this respect; their hours did not suit, and they had only twice met.

"And is she not delightful?"

"She is a very superior person," said Violet, looking down. "Do you know her sisters? I liked one of them."

"We shall have to call on them, but they are mere ordinary girls — no companions to Theresa. She laments it very much, and has had to make a line for herself. I must come and tell you about it some morning. It is nonsense to meet in this way and think of conversation."

Theodora had, in the mean time, had the exclusive attention of Miss Marstone. "So Emma is constant to the Præ-Raffaelite," said Theodora, as they drove from the door. "What is all this about the Priory?"

"Did Miss Marstone talk about that?" said Violet, aghast.

"She said something about a restoration. What! is it a secret?"

"I suppose she thought you must know it, since I did. I was much surprised by her beginning about it to me; for when Emma first mentioned it to me, Lady Elizabeth seemed vexed, and begged me never to hint at it."

"So Emma wants to make restitution. Well done, little Emma! I did not think it was in her."

"It has been her darling scheme for years; but Lady Elizabeth has made her promise to wait still she is five-and-twenty, and not to consider herself pledged."

"How like Lady Elizabeth! One respects her like an institution! I hope Emma may hold out, but she has a firebrand in her counsels. I am glad you are not infatuated."

"I am sure I don't know what I think of Miss Marstone. I cannot like her; yet I want to admire her — she is so good."

"Let her be as good as she pleases; why should she be silly?"

"Oh! she is very clever."

"When good and clever people are silly, they are the biggest simpletons of all."

"Then I don't think I quite know what you mean by silliness."

"Not turning one's sense to the best advantage, I suppose," said Theodora. "That Miss Marstone provokes me. If her principles were not right I should not care; but when she has sound views, to see her go on talking, with no reserve, only caring for what is out of the way, it makes one feel one's self turned to ridicule. How can Lady Elizabeth endure it?"

"I don't think she likes it, but Emma is so fond of her!"

"Oh! as to Emma, her poor little imagination is dazzled. It is providential that she has four years to wait! Unless, indeed, there is a re-action, and she marries either a broken-down fox-hunter or a popular preacher."

Violet's horrified protests were cut short by the carriage stopping. In returning, they called at Mrs. Finch's house, to inquire when the family were expected to return from Paris. They had arrived that morning, and Violet said she would make a short visit, and then go home and send the carriage back, but Theodora preferred walking home.

As they were announced, Mrs. Finch started up from a

gilded sofa on which she had been reclining, reading a French *brochure*. Her dress was in the excess of the newest Parisian fashion, such as even to London eyes looked *outré*, and, as well as her hair, had the disordered look of being just off a journey. Her face had a worn aspect, and the colour looked fixed. Theodora, always either rigidly simple or appropriately splendid, did not like Violet to see her friend in such a condition, and could almost have shrunk from the eager greeting. "Theodora Martindale! This is delightful! It is a real charity to look in on us to-day! Mrs. Martindale, how are you? You look better than last time I saw you. Let me introduce you to Mr. Finch."

Mr. Finch was a little dried up man, whose ceremonious bow put Violent in mind of the Mayor of Wrangerton. Bending low, he politely gave her a chair, and then subsided into oblivion; while Miss Gardner came forward, as usual, the same trim, quiet, easy-mannered person, and began to talk to Violet, while Mrs. Finch was loudly conversing with Theodora.

The apartment was much in the same style as the lady's dress, full of gilding and bright colour; expensive, but not producing a good effect; especially as the sofa had been dragged forward to the fire, and travelling gear and newspapers lay about untidily. Altogether there was something unsatisfactory to the feelings of both Theodora and Violet, though Mrs. Finch was very affectionate in her impetuous way, and Miss Gardner gently kind to Violet, asking many questions about her little boy.

Violet soon took leave, and Mr. Finch went down with her to the carriage.

"That is a fresh complexion, that does one good to see!" cried Mrs. Finch, when she was gone. "I am glad to see her in better looks and spirits."

"She understands the art of dress," said Miss Gardner.

Theodora was on the point of making a sharp answer. It was the consequence of having once allowed her brother's

wife to be freely canvassed, and she was glad that an opening door checked the conversation.

There entered a tall fashionable-looking man, with a glossy brown mustache, and a very hairy chin, but of prepossessing and gentlemanlike appearance. He leant over the sofa, and said a few words in a low voice to Mrs. Finch, who answered with nods, and a display of her white teeth in smiles. Raising himself, as if to go, he said, "Ah! by-the-bye, who is that pretty friend of yours that I met Finch escorting down stairs? A most uncommon style of beauty —"

"That was Mrs. Martindale," said Miss Gardner, rather in haste.

"Arthur Martindale's village maid? Ha! Jane, there's jealousy; I thought you told me —"

"Georgina!" exclaimed Jane, "you should have introduced Mark to Miss Martindale."

As Theodora moved her stately neck she felt as if a thunderbolt had fallen; but the gentleman's manner was particularly pleasing.

"It is Jane's concern," said Mrs. Finch, laughing. "I leave you to infer why she checks his communications."

"There is nothing more awkward than 'You told me so,' said Mr. Gardner, "since the days of 'Who is your next neighbour, Sir?' I may be allowed some interest in the matter, for your brother is an old school-fellow of mine."

"Come!" exclaimed Georgina, "if you stay dawdling here, my letter won't be written, and my vases won't come. Fancy, Theodora, such delicious Sèvres vases, big enough to hold the Forty Thieves, sky blue, with medallions of Mars and Venus, and Cupids playing tricks — the loveliest things imaginable — came from Versailles — absolutely historical."

"Lauzun is supposed to have been hidden in one," said Mr. Gardner.

"I vowed I would have them, and I never fail. Mark has been through fire and water for them."

"And I suppose they cost —" said Theodora.

"The keep of half a dozen starving orphans," said Mrs. Finch, triumphantly. "Ay, you may look, Theodora; but they are my trophies."

"I wish you joy of them," said Theodora.

"So you shall, when you see them; and that she may, off with you, Mark, or the post will go."

"My cousin is a despot," said Mark, moving off, with a bow to Theodora; Mrs. Finch following, spoke a few words, and then shut him into the other room.

"Poor Mark!" said Jane, in the interval. "We have brought him home. He has had a little property left him, and means to clear off his debts, and make a fresh beginning. His poor mother is so delighted!"

"The coast is clear," said Mrs. Finch, returning. "Now, Theodora, is it true that you are going to be married?"

Point blank questions did not excite Theodora's blushes; and she composedly answered, "Some time or other."

"There! I knew it could not be true," cried Jane.

"What is not true?" said Theodora.

"Not that you are going to have the curate!" said Mrs. Finch. "Jane, Jane, that has brought the rouge! Oh! I hope and trust it is not the curate."

"Certainly not," said Theodora, in a grave deliberate voice.

"That's a mercy!" said Mrs. Finch. "I had not the slightest confidence in you. I always reckoned on your making some wild choice. Oh! by-the-bye, do tell me where Percy Fotheringham is to be found. I must have him at our first party. What a charming book that is!"

"Even at Paris every one is full of it, already," said Jane. "I feel quite jealous of you, Theodora, for knowing him so well, when we, his cousins, never saw him at all."

"Cousins in royal fashion," said Theodora, glad that the blush had begun for Mr. Wingfield. "What is the exact connexion?"

"You explain, Jane; it is past me. I am content to count kindred with the royal beast."

"Lady Fotheringham, his uncle's wife, is sister to Mark's mother, my uncle's wife," said Jane. "There! I trust that is lucidly done."

"That is all, is it?" said Theodora.

"Enough for the sending of a card. Tell me where, if you know."

Theodora named the place.

"Does he show off well? Mark says he has claws —"

"I have known him too long to tell how he appears to strangers," said Theodora, as the colour mounted again.

"Do you see much of him?"

"He comes to Arthur's house."

"You have ventured there?" said Jane. "It was hard not to be able to come for the season otherwise."

"I came up to bring the dumb boy to the Asylum. I am staying on because I like it."

"Do you mean to go out with her?"

"When she goes, I do so too, but I am not come for the season. My brother's regiment is ordered to Windsor, and perhaps I may stay to be with her."

"She has more manner than last year," said Jane: "she is greatly improved in looks. You will believe me, Theodora, all I said to Mark only referred to her paleness."

"It won't do, Jane," said her sister; "you only make it worse. I see how it is; Theodora has found out that her sister-in-law is a pretty little pet of a thing that does her no harm, and you have got into the wrong box by flattering her first dislike. Yes, yes, Theodora, we know Jane of old; and never could get her to see the only safe way is to tell one's mind straight out."

"I don't see it established that I did not tell Theodora my real mind," said Jane, quietly; "I always thought Mrs. Martindale pretty and elegant —"

"Self-evident," said Georgina; "but if I had been among you, would not I have told Theodora the poor child was

cowed by her dignities, and Mrs. Nesbit and all the rest? Oh, I would have made much of her, and brought her forward. She should have been my queen of Violets: I would have done it last year if that unlucky baby had not come in the way."

"And now she does not need patronage," said Jane.

"No; and now Theodora has found her out for herself — a better thing," said Mrs. Finch. "You look all the better for it! I never saw you look so bright or so handsome, Theodora! You are a happy girl!" — and there was a sigh. Some interruption here occurring, Theodora took her leave, and walked home. She felt ruffled by her visit, and as she came in-doors, ran upstairs and knocked at her sister's door. The room looked cool and pleasant, and Violet was lying down in her white, frilled dressing-gown, so freshly, purely, delicately neat, and with so calm and sweet a smile, that the contrast marked itself strongly, and Theodora thought no one ever looked more innocent and engaging. "I hope you are not tired?"

"Oh, no; I only thought it wiser to rest, thank you."

"I came to tell you that Georgina Finch wants us to go to a party next Tuesday week. There's nothing to prevent it, is there?"

"I know of nothing; but Arthur will say —"

"We are to bring Percy. I meant to have told them of our affair; but I did not think they deserved it just then. I am glad he is no real relation to that Mr. Gardner."

"Was it Mr. Gardner who met me going down stairs?" said Violet, with an unpleasant recollection of having been stared at. "Is he their brother?"

"No, their cousin. I wonder what you think of them?" said Theodora, hastily throwing aside her bonnet and gloves, and seating herself.

"Miss Gardner is very good-natured and pleasing."

"Those words are made for her. But what of Georgina?"

"I hardly know her," said Violet, hesitating. "This is

only the second time I have seen her; and last year I was so unwell that her liveliness was too much for me."

"Overpowering," said Theodora. "So people say. It is time she should steady, but she will not think. I 'm provoked with her. I did not like her looks to-day, and yet she has a good warm heart. She is worth a dozen Janes! Don't prefer Jane to her, whatever you do, Violet!" Then breaking off, she began earnestly, "You see, Violet, those are my oldest friends; I never could care for any girl but Georgina, and we have done such things together as I never can forget. They had great disadvantages; a set of wretched governesses — one worse than the other, and were left entirely to their mercy. My education was no pattern, but it was a beauty to theirs, thanks to my father. I do believe I was the only person with any serious notions that Georgina ever came in contact with, in all her growing up. Their father died just as she was coming out, leaving very little provision for them; and they were shifted about among fine relations who only wanted to get rid of them, and gave them to understand they must marry for a home."

"Poor girls! What a miserable life!"

"Jane knew she was no beauty, and took to the obliging line. She fawns, and is intimate and popular. I never liked her silkiness, though it creeps into one at the time. Georgina had more in her. I wish you could have seen her at eighteen. She was such a fine, glowing, joyous-looking girl, with those bright cheeks, and her eyes dancing and light hair waving, and exuberant spirits that no neglect or unkindness could daunt — all wild gaiety, setting humbug at defiance, and so good-natured! Oh! dear, it makes one melancholy!"

"And what made the change?"

"She had a long, low, nervous fever, as they called it, but I have never known much about it, for it was when we were all taken up with John's illness. She was very long in recovering, and I suppose her spirit was broken, and that the homelessness grew unbearable; for whereas she had always declared for honest independence and poverty, the

next thing I heard of her was, that she had accepted this miserable money-making old wretch!"

"Perhaps she liked him."

"No, indeed! She despises him, and does not hide it! She is true! that is the best of her. I *cannot* help caring for Georgina. Poor thing, I hate to see it! Her spirits as high as ever, and with as little ballast; and yet she looks so fagged. She was brought up to dissipation — and does not know where else to turn. She has not a creature to say a word the right way!"

"Not her sister?" said Violet. "She seemed serious and good."

"No one can tell what is the truth in Jane," said Theodora; "and her sister, who knows her best, is the last person to be influenced by her. Some one to whom she could look up is the only chance. Oh, how I wish she had a child! Anything to love would make her think. But there was something in the appearance of that room I cannot get over."

"The confusion of arriving —"

"No, nothing ever could have made it so with you! I don't know what it was, but —. Well, I do think nothing else prevented me from telling them about Percy. I meant it when I said I would stay after you, and they talked about his book, and asked if I saw much of him, and I faced it out, so that they never suspected it, and now I think it was cowardly. I know! I will go at once, and write Georgina a note, and tell her the truth."

She went, and after a little interval, Violet began to dress for a party at the house of a literary friend of Lady Martindale's, where they were to meet an Eastern grandee then visiting London. As she finished, she bethought herself that Theodora had never before had to perform a grand toilette without a lady's maid, and going to her room, found her indeed with her magnificent black tresses still spread over her shoulders, flushed, humiliated, almost angry at her own failures in disposing of them.

"Don't I look like an insane gipsy?" said she, looking up and tossing back the locks that hung over her face.

"Can I do anything to help you?"

"Thank you; sit down, and I 'll put all this black stuff out of the way," said Theodora, grasping her hair with the action of the Tragic Muse. "I 'll put it up in every-day fashion. I wish you would tell me what you do to yours to get it into those pretty plaits."

"I could show you in a minute; but as it is rather late, perhaps you would not dislike my trying to put it up for you."

"Thank you — no, pray don't, you will tire yourself."

But it was spoken with none of the old disdain, and left an opening for coaxing.

"I used to be thought a good hand with my sister's hair. It will be such a treat if you will only let me try," said she, emboldened to stroke the raven tresses, and then take the comb, while Theodora yielded, well pleased. "On condition you give me a lesson to-morrow. I am not to be maid-ridden all my life," and it ended with "Thank you! That is comfortable. You came in my utmost need. I am only ashamed of having troubled you."

"Don't say so. I am so much obliged to you for letting me try. It is more like being at home with you," murmured Violet, turning away, but her voice as well as the glass betrayed her tearful eyes, and Theodora's sensation was a reward for her pride having slumbered and allowed her to accept a service.

Mr. Fotheringham came to dinner that he might go with them to the party. As they were drinking coffee before setting out, Mrs. Finch's invitation was mentioned.

"You had better leave your card for her, Percy," said Theodora. He made no answer.

"Will you dine with us first and go?" said Violet.

"Thank you, I do not mean to visit them."

"No!" exclaimed Theodora. "They are connexions!"

"The more cause for avoiding them."

"I have promised to introduce you."

"I am afraid you reckoned without your host."

"Ha!" cried Arthur, "the lion is grown coquettish with fine feeding. He is not easy of leading."

"She is my greatest friend," said Theodora, as if it was conclusive; but Percy only answered, "I should be very sorry to believe so," set down his cup and began to read the paper. She was the more irritated. "Percy," she said, "do you really not intend to go to this party?"

"Certainly not."

"Not to visit a relation of your own, and my most intimate friend, when it is my especial desire?"

"You do not know what you are talking of," he answered, without raising his eyes.

"Percy!" exclaimed Theodora, her pride and affection so mortified that she forgot that Arthur was looking on with mischievous glee, "have you any reason for this neglect?"

"Of course I have," said he, reading on.

"Then let me hear it."

"You force it from me, Theodora," said Percy, laying down the paper: "it is because I will not enter into any intercourse I can avoid with persons whose conduct I disapprove."

Violet coloured and shrank closer to her husband. Theodora's face and neck turned almost crimson, and her eyes sparkled, but her voice only showed unmoved disdain. "Remember, she is my *friend*."

"You do not know her history, or you would not call her so."

"I do. What is there to be ashamed of?"

"I see, you know nothing of the prior attachment," said Percy, not without anger at her pertinacity.

"A boy and girl liking that had been long past."

"O it had, had it!" said Percy, ironically. "So you approve her marrying an old rogue and miser, who had heaped up his hoards by extortion of wretched Indians and

Spaniards, the very scum of Mammon, coming to the top like everything detestable?"

"I never heard his money was ill-gotten."

"Those who spend don't ask whence gold comes. And you justify her keeping the old love, this cousin, dangling about her house all the winter till she is the talk of Paris."

"I don't believe gossip."

"Can you deny that he is in London in her train?"

"He has come into some property, and means to turn over a new leaf."

"Ay, and a worse leaf than before."

"How can you judge of his resolutions?"

Arthur laughed, saying, "I 'd not bet much on Mark Gardner's."

Much to Violet's relief, the carriage was announced; the gentlemen walked, and Theodora talked of indifferent matters fast and gaily. Percy handed Mrs. Martindale out, and gave her his arm, leaving Theodora to her brother.

It was a small select party, almost every one known to Theodora, and she was soon in eager conversation at some distance from Violet, who was sorry for Percy, as he stood in silence beside her own chair, vexation apparent on his honest face.

"Who is that talking to Theodora?" he presently asked.

It was a small light-complexioned gentleman, whose head and face, and the whole style of his dress and person, might have made him appear a boy of seventeen, but for a pale mustache and tuft on the chin. Theodora looked very animated, and his face was glowing with the pleasure of her notice.

"I cannot tell," said Violet; "there is Arthur, ask him."

Percy was moving towards Arthur, when he was caught by the master of the house, and set to talk to the Oriental in his own language. Violet had never been so impressed by his talents as while listening to his fluent conversation in the foreign tongue, making the stranger look delighted and amused, and giving the English audience lively interpreta-

tions, which put them into ready communication with the wonder at whom they had hitherto looked in awkwardness. Theodora did not come near the group, nor seem to perceive Violet's entreating glances, and when the Eastern prince departed, Percy had also disappeared. Violet was gratified by the ladies around her descanting on his book and his Syriac, and wished Theodora could hear them.

At that moment she found Theodora close to her, presenting Lord St. Erme to Mrs. Arthur Martindale! After so much dislike to that little insignificant light man for being the means of vexing Percy, to find him the poet hero, the feudal vision of nobility, the Lord of Wrangerton! What an adventure for her mother to hear of!

It was a pleasant and rather pretty face when seen near, with very good blue eyes, and an air of great taste and refinement, and the voice was very agreeable, as he asked some question about the Eastern prince. Violet hardly knew what she answered.

"I met him yesterday, but it was flat," he said. "They had a man there whose Syriac was only learnt from books, and who could not understand him. The interpreter to-night was far more *au-fait* — very clever he seemed. Who was he?"

"Mr. Fotheringham," said Theodora.

"The Crusader? Was it, indeed?" said Lord St. Erme, eagerly. "Is he here? I wish particularly to make his acquaintance."

"I believe he is gone," said Violet, pitying the unconscious victim, and at once amused, provoked, and embarrassed.

"You know him?"

Violet marvelled at the composure of Theodora's reply. "Yes, my eldest brother was his travelling companion."

"Is it possible? Your brother the 'M' of the book?" exclaimed the young Earl, with enthusiastic delight and interest. "I never guessed it! I must read it again for the sake of meeting him."

"You often do meet him there," said Theodora, "as my sister can testify. She was helping him to revise it last summer at Ventnor."

"I envy you!" cried Lord St. Erme, "to go through such a book with such a companion was honour indeed!"

"It was delightful," said Violet.

"Those are such delicious descriptions," proceeded he. "Do you remember the scene where he describes the crusading camp at Constantinople? It is the perfection of language — places the whole before you — carries you into the spirit of the time. It is a Tasso unconscious of his powers, borne along by his innate poetry;" then pausing, "surely you admire it, Miss Martindale?"

"O, yes," said Theodora, annoyed at feeling a blush arising.

The Earl seemed sensible of a check, and changed his tone to a sober and rather timid one, as he inquired after Mr. Martindale. The reply was left to Violet.

"He has never been so well in his life. He is extremely busy, and much enjoys the beauty of the place."

"I suppose it is very pretty," said Lord St. Erme.

"Nothing can be more lovely than the colour of the sea, and the wonderful foliage, and the clearness. He says all lovers of fine scenery ought to come there."

"Scenery can hardly charm unless it has a past," he replied.

"I can controvert that," said Theodora.

With much diffidence he replied: "I speak only of my own feeling. To me, a fine landscape without associations has no soul. It is like an unintellectual beauty."

"There are associations in the West Indies," said Theodora.

"Not the most agreeable," said Lord St. Erme.

"There is the thought of Columbus," said Violet; "his whole character, and his delight as each island surpassed the last."

"Now, I have a fellow-feeling for the buccaneers," said

Theodora. "Bertram Risingham was always a hero of mine. I believe it is an ancestral respect, probably we are their descendants."

Violet wondered if she said so to frighten him.

"*Rokeby* has given a glory to buccaneering," he replied. "It is the office of poetry to gild nature by breathing a soul into her. It is what the Americans are trying to do for their new world, still turning to England as their Greece."

"I meant no past associations," said Theodora, bluntly. "John carries his own with him."

"Yes; all may bear the colour of the imagination within."

"And of the purpose," said Theodora. "It is work in earnest, no matter where, that gives outward things their interest. Dreaming will never do it. Working will."

Their conversation here closed; but Theodora said as they went home: "What did you think of him, Violet?"

"He looks younger than I expected."

"He would be good for something if he could be made to work. I long to give him a pickaxe, and set him on upon the roads. Then he would see the beauty of them! I hate to hear him maunder on about imagination, while he leaves his tenantry to take their chance. *He* know what eyes Percy and John see things with!"

"I am glad to have seen him," said Violet, re-assured.

"He desired to be introduced to you."

"I wonder — do you think — do you suppose he remembers —?"

"I don't suppose he thinks anything about it," said Theodora, shortly.

CHAPTER XIV.

I am not yet of Earl Percy's mind.

King Henry IV.

"Violet," said Theodora, the next morning; "I want to know if Percy said more to Arthur than to us?"

She spoke with deepening colour, and Violet's glowed

still more, as she answered: "Arthur asked him, and he said he would not *begin* an acquaintance, but that there was no occasion to break off the ordinary civilities of society. He accused her of no more than levity. Yes, those were Arthur's words."

"I am going to get to the bottom of it," said Theodora; "and give Georgina a thorough lecture."

She departed; and Violet sat down to her letters, with little Johnnie crawling at her feet; but in a few minutes, she was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Fotheringham, asking for Theodora.

"She is gone out. She could not rest without an explanation from Mrs. Finch."

"A proper farrago she will hear," said Percy. "I found I could settle to nothing, so I thought it best to come and have it out."

"I hope she will soon come in."

"Don't let me interrupt you. Go on with your letters.—Ha! little master!"

In his present temper, play with the baby was the most congenial occupation, and he made the little fellow very happy till he was carried off for his midday sleep. Then he tried to read, but seemed so uneasy, that Violet wondered if it would be intermeddling to hint at Theodora's real views. At last, as if he could bear it no longer, he abruptly said, "Mrs. Martindale, do you know anything of these people?"

"Very little," she answered. "Theodora was telling me about them yesterday, before you came. I believe she only likes them for old acquaintance sake."

"Is it true that she used to go out with them last year?"

"I believe that she did sometimes."

"At least, I hope that will not happen again."

"No, I should not think it would. I am sure Theodora does not entirely approve of Mrs. Finch."

"She defended her through thick and thin."

"You shocked her with the suddenness of what you said.

She cannot forget the having been happy together as children; but she thinks as you do, and disliked the marriage very much. Before you came, she had been lamenting over Mrs. Finch."

"Then, it was pure perverseness!"

"If I said so, I wonder what you would answer," said Violet, with a bright, arch look.

"I should hear reason," said Percy, roughly, as if to repel the sweetness; yet it had a mollifying effect, and he presently spoke with less irritation and more regret.

"She suspects no evil, and cannot understand any imputation on her friend. She fancies I speak from report, but I have known this fellow, Mark, all my life. His mother is a sister of my aunt Fotheringham. They wanted me to hunt up an appointment to get him out of the young lady's way."

"Before her marriage?"

"Ay. When I was last in England, there was a great to-do at the discovery of an engagement between this youth and Miss Georgina. I suppose, considering her bringing up, she was not much to be blamed. I remember my aunt thought the poor girl harshly dealt with."

"O, that must have been the cause of the nervous fever Theodora mentioned. She said she knew no particulars."

"She has not been openly dealt with," said Percy. "They do not dare to let her see their doings."

"So the poor thing was tormented into this marriage?"

"No torment needed. The elder sister did try to warn her that it could not turn out well. I should think the old rogue had found his punishment for his extortions. Fine stories I could tell you of him in South America. Now, am I not justified in keeping clear of them? Let Theodora say what she will, it does not make it right for me to put myself in the way of those great extravagant dinners and parties of theirs, where they want me for nothing but a show-off."

"I am sure Theodora will think with you, when she is cooler, and not taken by surprise."

The clock struck.

"There, I have an appointment!"

"I wish you could wait for luncheon. She must come then."

"What are you going to do this evening?"

"I am sorry to say that we dine out; but to-morrow is Sunday, and you will be sure to find us at home."

He went, and one o'clock came, but no Theodora. Violet had waited ten minutes for luncheon before she returned.

"I did not know how late it was," said she. "I wish you had begun without me."

Then, throwing her bonnet into a chair, and cutting some cake, she proceeded: "Such hours as they keep! No one but Jane was up when I came, so I went to her room, and told her I would hear the rights of it."

"Were you satisfied?"

"Georgina has been foolish and unguarded, and the world is very ill-natured. I hate it altogether, from beginning to end," said Theodora, with an impatient gesture. "Most decidedly," she added, "Georgina never ought to have married. I forced it from Jane that she had never cared for any one but this Mark. The discovery of his extravagance and misconduct was the real overthrow of my poor Georgina. It was that which brought on her illness; the family were very unkind; and at last weakness and persecution broke down her spirit, and she was ready to do anything to escape."

"Poor thing! poor thing!"

"She had nothing to fall back upon. O, if I had but been there! If I had but known it at the time!"

"Well, and now?" said Violet, anxiously.

"The having Mr. Gardner there now? Really, I don't think she deserves all this abuse. The other matter is entirely passed away. Mr. Finch likes him, and they understand each other fully. Coming to them detaches him from his former habits, and gives him the best chance. His mother is so relieved to know he is with them. If Jane saw anything in the least amiss, she says she would be the first to take alarm; and I *do* trust her for that, for the sake of appearances."

"I suppose it is a question of appearances," said Violet, with the diffident blushes of her eighteen years.

"Is she to throw away the hope of rescuing her cousin, to save herself from spiteful tongues?" cried Theodora. "Not that I suppose Lady Fotheringham means to be spiteful, but Percy hears it all from her, and we know very well that good ladies in the country have a tendency to think every one good for nothing that lives in London or Paris, especially their relations. That is all nonsense. If Percy goes by gossip, I don't. I go by my own observation, and I see there is nothing at which to take exception. I watched her and Mr. Gardner together, and I do declare there was nothing but ease and frankness. I am sure he was more inclined to pay that sort of attention to me. He really is very entertaining. I must tell you some of his stories."

"Percy has been here," said Violet.

"Has he?"

"He waited till twelve, and then was obliged to go."

Theodora kept silence for some minutes, then said: "If he thinks to make me give my friends up, he is much mistaken! You know I had written to Georgina last night. Well, she thought I had come to be congratulated; and if you had but seen the greeting — the whole manner — when she met me! Oh! you would know how impossible it is not to feel for her, with all one's heart!"

"Yes, yes. I suppose you could not say anything about this to her. No, of course not."

"Not of *course* at all, if I could have had her alone, but Jane was there all the time. It was a pleasure to see the contrast between her manner and Jane's. There was soul in her, real hopes I should be happy, while Jane seemed only to think it tolerable, because I might end in being an ambassadress. I will see her again before the party, and draw my own conclusions."

"Does she know that Percy will not go?"

"I know no such thing."

She was too proud to ask what had passed in Violet's

interview with him, and indeed was ready to take fire at the idea of their affairs having been discussed with her.

She strove to believe herself the offended party, but her conscience was not easily appeased, though she tried to set it at rest by affectionate care of Violet, and was much gratified by Arthur's stopping her after Violet had gone upstairs at night, to beg her to stay, while he was at Windsor with his regiment.

"Thank you, for making me of use," she said.

"I shall come backwards and forwards continually," said Arthur, "but she must not be alone; I shall be very glad if you can stay, or I shall be driven to have one of the Mosses here."

"Oh, no, no! I shall be most happy to stay. I will take every care of her."

"Thank you, Theodora; good night. You have got to know her better now," he continued, lingering as on that first night to gain some word of commendation of her."

"Much better," said Theodora, cordially. "One cannot help growing fond of her — so gentle and engaging."

She was pleased with his satisfaction; and while she owned Violet's sincerity and sweetness, considered her one of those soft dependent beings formed to call forth tenderness from strong and superior spirits, and gloried in being necessary to her: it almost restored her balance of complacency.

On Sunday afternoon Violet stayed at home with little Johnnie, and the vacant place in the seat at church was filled by Mr. Fotheringham. Many thoughts floated through Theodora's mind; but whether the better or the worse would gain the advantage seemed rather to depend on chance than on herself. Perhaps she was not yet conscious what were her besetting sins, and thus the conflict was merely a struggle between her feelings for her friend and for her lover.

Arthur walked home with an acquaintance; but Theodora turned from Percy, and threw herself into eager conversation with Lady Elizabeth.

On entering the house, as Violet was not in the drawing-room, Theodora was going up stairs, when Percy said, in a tone of authority, "How long do you intend to go on in this way?"

"In what way?"

"Do you wish to keep all our disputes as a spectacle for Arthur's edification?"

Colouring with shame and displeasure, she sat down with a sort of "I am ready" air, and took off her walking things, laying them down deliberately, and waiting in complete silence. Did she wish to embarrass him, or did she await his first word to decide what line she should take?

"Theodora," he said at length, "when I spoke last night, I did not know how early your acquaintance with this lady had begun, or I should have shown more regard to the feeling that arises between old companions. I am afraid I gave you some unnecessary pain."

This was unexpected; and she could not at once harden herself in displeasure, so that though she spoke not, her countenance was relenting.

"Did Mrs. Martindale mention what I told her yesterday?"

"No; she only said you had been here. I was gone to satisfy my mind."

"And did you?"

"I should never have defended Georgina's marriage if I had known the whole; but the rest of what you have heard is slander."

"That is what I came to explain;" and Percy repeated the history he had before given to Violet, adding a warning of the same kind as John's against placing Arthur in Mr. Gardner's way.

"The point is," said Theodora, "what construction is to be placed on the present state of things? You and Lady Fotheringham, who have not seen them, take one view; I, who do see them, and who know Georgina intimately, take another, in which I agree with her husband and with the elder sister, who lives with her."

"Intimately! When you had no idea of this first affair!"

"Such follies are not to be published."

"You *will* defend them!" cried Percy, impatiently.

"Am I to sit quiet when I hear injustice done to my oldest friend?"

"I wish that unhappy friendship had never begun!"

A silence broken by her coolly saying, "Well, what is to come of all this?"

Percy walked about the room and said, "What do you mean?"

With a provoking air of meekness she said, "I only want to know what you expect of me?"

Excessively annoyed, he sharply answered, "To be a reasonable woman."

"Well?" said Theodora, with the same submissive voice.

He had recovered himself, and with no further show of temper, he sat down by her, saying, "This is folly. We had better say what we mean. You feel strongly with regard to your old playfellow; I cannot think well of her; but while this is matter of opinion, it is childish to dispute. Time will show which is the correct view — I shall be glad if it is yours. The elder sister is a steady amiable person, whom my aunt likes, and that is in their favour. I do not wish you to break with an old friend while we know of no positive charge against her, though I should think there could be little to attract you. For me it is another matter, and I will not."

"You will not adopt my friends?"

"I will not be talked into it.

"I do not understand your principle," said Theodora, but without asperity. "Why do you decline an acquaintance to which you do not object for me?"

"The beginning has been made in your case, and I know it is old affection, not present approval. You can't be hurt by one like her. But for my part, knowing what I do of them, I will enter on no acquaintance: it is a line of which I have resolved to keep clear. She would think herself patronising a literary man."

"Oh! you could not submit to that!" cried Theodora — "never. Stay away, I beg of you."

"It is for no such nonsense," said Percy. "But thinking of them as I do, I cannot receive from them the favours which rich folks consider invitations to poor ones. My connexion with them makes it all the more undesirable. I totally disapprove their style of conduct, and will not seem to sanction it by beginning an acquaintance, or appearing at their grand dinners and parties. If I had known them before, the case might be different."

"I will say no more. You are quite right," said Theodora, well able to appreciate the manliness of his independence.

She thought over several times the way of communicating to Mrs. Finch, Percy's rejection of her invitation, and made some attempts at seeing her, but without success, until the night of the party. Violet had an undefined dread of it, and was especially glad that her husband was able to go with them. It was one of the occasions when he was most solicitous about her appearance; and he was well pleased, for she was in very good looks, and prettily dressed with some Irish lace, that to Theodora's amusement she had taken off Miss Marstone's hands; and with his beautiful wife and distinguished looking sister, he had his wish of displaying woman as she should be.

The room was full, but Violet saw few acquaintance; as Mrs. Finch, with much display of streamer, flounce, jewellery, and shoulders, came to meet them with vehement welcome, and quite oppressed Violet with her attention in finding a seat for her on the sofa.

With a nod and look of gay displeasure at Theodora, she said, "So, you have brought me no Crusader, you naughty girl! Where 's your Red Cross Knight?"

"He would not come," said Theodora, gravely.

"You dare own it! Where 's your power? Ah! you will say it was idleness."

"I will tell you another time," said Theodora, blushing

inconveniently, and Violet, as she felt her cheeks responding, fancied Mrs. Finch must know why.

"You won't confess! No, you never tried. If you had once set your mind on it, you would have accomplished it. I always cite Theodora Martindale as the person who cannot be resisted."

"You see your mistake," returned Theodora.

A gentleman here greeted her, then claimed Mrs. Finch's attention, and evidently by his desire, she turned to Violet, and presented him as her cousin, Mr. Gardner, an old friend of Captain Martindale.

Violet acknowledged the courtesy, but it was in confusion and distress.

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance," was his address. "Is Captain Martindale here? I have not seen him for years."

"He is in the room," said Violet, looking round for him, hoping either that he would come, or that Mr. Gardner would go in search of him; but the conversation continued, though she answered without knowing what she said, till at last he moved away to communicate to Mrs. Finch that Arthur Martindale's pretty wife had nothing but fine eyes and complexion.

Theodora was satisfied to see a very slight recognition pass between Mr. Gardner and her brother, who was intent on conducting to Violet an officer newly returned from the West Indies, where he had met John. After a pleasant conversation, the two gentlemen moved away, and presently the place next to her was taken by Miss Gardner, with civil inquiries for her little boy.

"We are so vexed at not seeing Mr. Fotheringham! Georgina is furious. We reckoned on him as the lion of the night."

Violet had no answer to make, and Jane continued. "I have taken Theodora to task. Fame makes men capricious, and he is very odd; but I tell her she ought to have more influence, and I seriously think so. Do you not?"

"I believe he convinced her," said Violet, wishing the next moment to recall her words.

"Indeed! I am curious."

"I believe he thinks it better — fashionable life — " faltered Violet.

"He might have made an exception in favour of such near connexions! Why! we shall be related ourselves, Mrs. Martindale. How charmed I shall be."

Violet turned a bracelet on her arm, and could make no response.

"It is strange enough that we have never met Percival Fotheringham," said Miss Gardner. "He is an eccentric being, I hear, but our dear Theodora has a spice of eccentricity herself. I hope it will be for the best."

"He is an admirable person," said Violet.

"I rejoice to hear it. I had some doubts. The dear girl is so generous, of such peculiar decision, so likely to be dazzled by talent, and so warmly attached to her eldest brother, that I almost feared it might not have been well weighed. But you are satisfied?"

"O, yes, entirely so."

"I am relieved to hear it. In confidence I may tell *you*, it is said in *our own family*, that there is a rough overbearing temper about him. I could not bear to think of dear Theodora's high spirit being subjected to anything of that kind."

"He is abrupt," said Violet, eagerly; "but I assure you the better he is known, the more he is liked. My little boy is so fond of him."

"I am glad. No doubt you have every means of judging, but I own I was surprised at such ready consent. You were behind the scenes, no doubt, and can tell how that determined spirit carried the day."

"Lord Martindale gave his consent most readily and gladly," said Violet; but Jane was only the more convinced that Mrs. Martindale was as ignorant as ever of family secrets.

"It was best to do so with a good grace; but I did think

our dear Theodora might have looked higher! Poor Lord St. Erme! He would have been a more eligible choice. The family must have been much disappointed, for she might have had him at her feet, any day last summer."

"I do not think he would have suited her."

"Well! perhaps not, but an easy gentle temper might. However, it cannot be helped! Only the long engagement is unfortunate — very trying to both parties. I have seen so few turn out well! Poor Pelham Fotheringham! It is a pity he should stand between them and the baronetcy."

"Is he Sir Antony's son?"

"Yes; it is a sad affair. A fine tall youth, quite imbecile. He is his poor mother's darling, but no more fit to take care of himself than a child of five years old. A most melancholy thing! Old Sir Antony ought to set him aside, and let Percival enjoy the estate. Indeed, I should think it very probable he would do so — it would be greatly for the happiness of all parties."

"I think it would," said Violet.

"Percival can do anything with the old people, and they will be so delighted with the Martindale connexion! Perhaps it is an understood thing. Do you know whether it is?"

"I should not think so. I never heard anything of it."

"Has Theodora ever been introduced to the uncle and aunt?"

"Never."

"Good old folks, exceedingly primitive. Very kind, too, and a fine old-fashioned place; but, oh, so dull! All their ideas are of the seventeenth century. It will be a severe ordeal for poor Theodora, but if Lady Fotheringham, good old soul, is pleased with her, I shall expect grand consequences."

Violet was glad that Miss Gardner was asked to dance. Presently Arthur returned to her side. "Tired, Violet?" he asked. "Slow work, is not it? They have a queer lot here. Scarcely a soul one ever saw before."

"I was thinking so. Are there not a great many foreigners? I saw some immense mustaches."

"Ay. Percy would think himself back in Blue Beard's country. There is the King of the Clothes Brushes himself polking with Mrs. Finch. Can't you see?"

"No! I wish I could."

"An economical fellow! Every man his own clothes brush — two expenses saved at once, to say nothing of soap, an article that mayhap he does not deal in."

"Oh! hush! you will make me laugh too much. Where's Theodora?"

"Dancing with Gardner. He seems inclined to make up to her, unless it is a blind."

"He said he used to know you at school."

"Yes, scamp that he is. I had rather he had never turned up again! He is not worth Theodora's quarrelling about. I hear she is chattering away like fun. Have you had any one to speak to?"

"Miss Gardner came to me. She seemed to think Sir Antony might settle his property on Percy instead of on his son. Do you think there is any chance of it?"

"I wish he would. He could not do a wiser thing. But of course it is entailed — there 's always a provision of nature for starving the younger branches. What does she say to Percy's absence?"

"I fancy she guesses the reason, but I don't know.

"He is a lucky fellow, I know!" said Arthur, "to be safe in his bed at home! This evening is a bore, and I wish the whole set were further off, instead of deluding Theodora! I 'll get her away when this dance is over."

"Ha!" cried Mrs. Finch, suddenly stopping in front of them, and disengaging herself from her partner, as she breathlessly threw herself down beside Violet. "So, there 's Captain Martindale after all! How exemplary! And my poor Mrs. Martindale, that I told Jane and Mark to take such care of, left deserted to her husband's mercy!"

"Suppose she wished for nothing better," said Arthur, good-humouredly.

"I can't allow such things! Such a monopoly of our Guardsmen after two years' marriage is beyond bearing! What would they say to you in France?"

"We don't follow French fashions," said Arthur, his gay tone making his earnest like jest. "I am going to take my ladies home. I shall see for the carriage, Violet."

"Mrs. Martindale will learn my maxim — Never bring a husband to an evening party. There is nothing so much in the way."

"Or that would be so glad to be let off," said Arthur, going.

"You don't mean to take them away! That is the climax of all your crimes! Quite unallowable."

"Many things unallowable are done," said Arthur; "and I don't allow her to be over-tired."

"*Barbare*," began Mrs. Finch, but with a bow, as if it was a compliment, he was gone in search of the carriage. She sat for a moment silent, then said, "Well! I must forgive him. I never thought to see him so careful of anything! How happy Theodora seems in your *ménage*. Quite a different creature; but perhaps that is from another cause?"

Violet made a little attempt at a laugh.

"I am glad of it," said Mrs. Finch, heartily. "It is a horrid stiff place for her at home, is it not? And I am delighted she should escape from it. How she got consent, I can't imagine; and Theodora has notions of her own, and would do nothing without."

"Lord Martindale has a very high opinion of Mr. Fotheringham."

"I am not surprised. I read that book — a wonder for me, and was perfectly *éprise*. But I did not think a genius with empty pockets would have gone down at Martindale;

and he is a bit of a bear, too, they say, though perhaps Theodora likes him the better for that."

"Perhaps she does."

"I hope he is worthy of her. He is the great pride of the old folks at Worthbourne. One heard of Percy's perfections there morning, noon, and night, till I could have hated the sound of his name. Very generous of me to ask him here to-night, is it not? but I wish he would have come. I want to judge of him myself. I could not bear all not to be perfect with Theodora."

There was little occasion for Violet to speak, Mrs. Finch always kept the whole conversation to herself; but she could not but perceive that though the exaggeration and recklessness of style were unpleasing, yet it really was frank and genuine, and Theodora's declaration that Georgina was far preferable to Jane was less incomprehensible.

The evening was over, much to her relief; but there remained Theodora's bold undertaking to tell Mrs. Finch of Percy's refusal to visit her. Any one else would have let the subject drop, but Theodora thought this would be shabby and cowardly, and was resolved not to shrink from warning her friend.

She found Georgina looking over some cards of invitation, with an air of great dissatisfaction, and almost the first words that greeted her were, "Have you a card for Lady Albury's party?"

"Yes, I heard Violet ask Arthur if he should be at home for it."

"Very strange! We left our cards, I know, yet they never asked us to their party this week, and now seem to have missed us again. I wished particularly to go, for one is sure to meet all that is worth seeing, your knight among the rest. They are prim, strait-laced, exclusive people themselves; but it is a house worth going to."

"I did not remember that you knew them."

"Oh! yes, we did; we used to be there pretty often when we lived with my uncle Edward; and it is not that they do not think my poor old man good enough for them, for we went to their parties last year. So, Mrs. Martindale has a card, you say!"

Theodora's colour rose as she said, "Georgina, I am going to say what no one else will tell you. It is not your marriage, but you must take care —"

The crimson of Mrs. Finch's cheeks, and the precipitation with which she started to her feet, would have disconcerted most persons; but Theodora, though she cast down her eyes, spoke the more steadily; "You must be more guarded and reserved in manner if you wish to avoid unkind remarks."

"What? what? what?" cried Georgina, passionately, "what can the most ill-natured, the most censorious, accuse me of?"

"It is not merely the ill-natured," said Theodora. "I know very well that you mean no harm, but you certainly have an air of trying to attract attention."

"Well, and who does not? Some do so more demurely and hypocritically than others; but what else does any one go into company for? Do you expect us all to act the happy couple, like Captain and Mrs. Martindale the other night? You should have brought your own Percy to set us the example!" said she, ending with a most unpleasant laugh.

"Georgina, you must not expect to see Percy. He has rigid notions; he always avoids people who seek much after fashion and amusement, and, (I must say it,) he will not begin an acquaintance while you go on in this wild way."

"So!" exclaimed Georgina. "It is a new thing for the gentleman to be particular and fastidious! I wonder what harm he thinks I should do him! But I see how it is! He means to take you away, turn you against me, the only crea-

ture in this world that ever cared for me. Are not you come to tell me he forbids you ever to come near me?"

"No no! He does not, and if he did, would I listen?"

"No, don't, don't displease him on my account!" cried Mrs. Finch. "Go and be happy with him, I am not worth caring for, or vexing yourself about!"

The tears stood on her burning cheeks, and Theodora eagerly replied, "Have no fancies about me. Nothing shall ever make me give up my oldest friend. You ought to know me better than to think I would."

"You are so unlike those I live with!" said Georgina, sadly, as an excuse for the distrust. "Oh! you don't know what I have gone through, or you would pity me. You are the only thing that has not failed me. There is Jane, with her smooth tongue, and universal obligingness, she is the most selfish creature in existence. Her heart would go into a nutshell! One grain of sympathy, and I would never have married! It was all her doing! She wanted luxuries! O Theodora, if I had but been near you!"

"Hush! Georgina, this is no talk for a wife," said Theodora, severely.

"I thought you pitied me!"

"I do, indeed I do; but I cannot let you talk in that way."

"I never do so. No one else would care to hear me."

"Now listen to me, Georgina. You say you rely on me, as you do on no one else. Will you hear me tell you the only way to be happy yourself —"

"That is past," she murmured.

"Or to stand well in the opinion of others? I am putting it on low grounds."

"I know what you are going to say — Go and live in the country, and set up a charity-school."

"I say no such thing. I only ask you to be cautious in your manners, to make Mr. Finch of more importance, and not to let yourself be followed by your cousin —"

Again Georgina burst into her "thorn crackling" laugh. "Poor Mark! I thought that was coming! People *will* treat him as if he was a dragon!"

"I know you mean no harm," repeated Theodora; "but it cannot be right to allow any occasion for observations."

"Now, Theodora, hear me. I dare say Jane has been telling you some of her plausible stories, which do more harm than good, because no one knows which part to believe. There was some nonsense between Mark and me when we were young and happy! I confess that. Perhaps I thought he meant more than he did, and dwelt upon it as silly girls do, especially when they have nothing else to care for. Then came the discovery of all his debts and scrapes, poor fellow, and — I won't deny it — it half killed me, more especially when I found he had been attached to some low girl, and avowed that he had never seriously thought of me, — he believed I understood it as all sport. I was very ill. I wish I had died! There was no more to be done but to hate him! My uncle and aunt Edward were horridly savage, chiefly because I hindered them from going to Italy; and Mrs. George Gardner thought I had been deluding Mark! Then Lady Fotheringham asked us, and — it was dull enough to be sure, and poor Pelham was always in the way — but they were kind comfortable folks. Lady Fotheringham is a dear old dame, and I was in dull spirits just then, and rather liked to poke about with her, and get her to tell me about your brother and his Helen, —"

"Why! Jane said you were dying of low spirits!"

"Well, so I was. I hated it excessively sometimes. Jane is not entirely false in that. The evenings were horrid, and Sundays beyond everything unbearable. I confess I was delighted to get away to Bath; but there — if Jane would but have helped me, I would, indeed I would, have been thankful to have gone back to Worthbourne, even if I had had to play at draughts with Pelham for the rest of my days. But Jane was resolved, and all my strength and spirit had

been crushed out of me. She would not even let me write to you nor to Lady Fotheringham till it was too late."

"Well! that is all past," said Theodora, whose face had shown more sympathy than she thought it right to express in words. "The point is, what is right now?"

"And you see it is folly to say there is any harm or danger in my seeing Mark. He never had any attachment to me seven years ago, nor any other time, and whatever I felt for him had a thorough cure. I am not ashamed to say I am glad he should be here to give him a chance of marrying a fortune. That is the whole story. Are you satisfied?"

"Satisfied on what I never doubted, your own intentions, but no further. You ought to abstain from all appearance of evil."

"I am not going to give my cousin up to please Lady Albury! No, nor all the Fotheringhams put together! You used to say you did not care for gossip!"

"No more I do, but I care for a proper appearance."

"Very well. — Hush! — here he comes."

He was Mr. Gardner, and whether it was that Mrs. Finch was more guarded, or that her pleading influenced Theodora's judgment, nothing passed that could excite a suspicion that anything remained of the former feeling between the cousins. It was in truth exactly as Mrs. Finch said; for whatever were her faults, she was perfectly frank and sincere, clinging to truth, perhaps out of opposition to her sister. Mark was not a man capable of any genuine or strong affection; and as Theodora rightly perceived, the harm of Georgina's ways was not so much what regarded him, as in the love of dissipation, the unguarded forward manner with all gentlemen alike, and the reckless pursuit of excitement. There was a heart beneath, and warmth that might in time be worked upon by better things.

"It is a great pity that people will drop her," she said to

Violet. "The more she is left to that stamp of society, the worse it is for her whole tone of mind."

Violet agreed, pitied, and wished it could be helped; but whenever they met Mrs. Finch in company, saw it was not wonderful that people did not like her.

Mr. Gardner was, on the contrary, a general favourite. Every one called him good for nothing; but then he was so very amusing! Violet could never find this out, shrank from his notice, and withdrew as much as possible from his neighbourhood; Emma Brandon generally adhering closely to her, so as to avoid one whom she viewed as a desperate designer on the Priory.

It was in parties that Violet chiefly saw Emma this spring. Theodora's presence in Cadogan-place frightened her away; and, besides, her mornings were occupied by Miss Marstone's pursuits. Lady Elizabeth made no objection to her sharing in these, though sometimes not fully convinced of the prudence of all the accessories to their charities; and still less pleased at the influence exercised by Theresa over her daughter's judgment.

Emma's distaste to society was now far more openly avowed, and was regarded by her not as a folly to be conquered, but a mark of superiority. Her projects for Rickworth were also far more prominent. Miss Marstone had swept away the veil that used to shroud them in the deepest recess of Emma's mind, and to Violet it seemed as if they were losing their gloss by being produced whenever the friends wanted something to talk about. Moreover, Emma, who was now within a few months of twenty-one, was seized with a vehement desire to extort her mother's consent to put them at once in execution, and used to startle Violet by pouring out lamentations over her promise, as if it was a cruel thraldom. Violet argued that the scheme was likely to be much better weighed by giving time to think.

"It has been the thought of my life! Besides, I have Theresa's judgment; and, oh! Violet, mamma means it

well, I know; but she does not know what she asks of me! Think, think if I should die in the guilt of sacrilege!"

"Really, Emma, you should not say such dreadful things. It is not your doing."

"No; but I reap the benefit of it. My grandfather bought it. Oh! if it should bring a curse with it?"

"Well, but, Emma, I should think, even if it be wrong to hold it, that cannot be your fault yet. You mean to restore it; and surely it must be better to keep it as yet, than to act directly against your mother's wishes."

"I don't mean to act against her wishes; but if she would only wish otherwise!"

"Perhaps it is the best preparation to be obliged to wait patiently."

"If it was for any good reason; but I know it is only because it would better suit mamma's old English notions to see me go and marry in an ordinary way, like any commonplace woman, as Theresa says. Ah! you would like it too, Violet. It is of no use talking to you! As Theresa says, the English domestic mind has but one type of goodness."

Violet did not like to hear her dear Lady Elizabeth contemned; but she had no ready answer, and humbly resigned herself to Emma's belief that she was less able to enter into her feelings than that most superior woman, Theresa Marstone.

CHAPTER XV.

Give unto me, made lowly wise,
The spirit of self-sacrifice.

When Arthur went with his regiment to Windsor, the ladies intended to spend their evenings at home, a rule which had many exceptions, although Violet was so liable to suffer from late hours and crowded rooms, that Lady Elizabeth begged her to abstain from parties, and offered more than once to take charge of Theodora; but the reply always was that they went out very little, and that this once it would not hurt her.

The truth was that Theodora had expressed a decided aversion to going out with the Brandons. "Lady Elizabeth sits down in the most stupid part of the room," she said, "and Emma stands by her side with the air of a martyr. They look like a pair of respectable country cousins set down all astray, wishing for a safe corner to run into, and wondering at the great and wicked world. And they go away inhumanly early, whereas if I do have the trouble of dressing, it shall not be for nothing. I ingeniously eluded all going out with them last year, and a great mercy it was to them."

So going to a royal ball was all Theodora vouchsafed to do under Lady Elizabeth's protection; and as her objections could not be disclosed, Violet was obliged to leave it to be supposed that it was for her own gratification that she always accompanied her; although not only was the exertion and the subsequent fatigue a severe tax on her strength, but she was often uneasy and distressed by Theodora's conduct. Her habits in company had not been materially changed by her engagement; she was still bent on being the first object,

and Violet sometimes felt that her manner was hardly fair upon those who were ignorant of her circumstances. For Theodora's own sake, it was unpleasant to see her in conversation with Mr. Gardner; and not only on her account but on that of Lord St. Erme, was her uncertain treatment of him a vexation to Violet.

Violet, to whom Theodora's lovers were wont to turn when suffering from her caprice, was on very friendly terms with the young Earl. He used to come and stand by her, and talk to her about Wrangerton, and seem quite amused and edified by her quiet enthusiasm for it, and for Helvellyn, and her intimacy with all the pictures which he had sent home and almost forgotten. His sister was another favourite theme; she was many years younger than himself, and not yet come out; but he was very desirous of introducing her to Mrs. and Miss Martindale; and Violet, who had heard of Lady Lucy all her life, was much pleased when a day was fixed for a quiet dinner at Mrs. Delaval's, the aunt with whom she lived. How Mrs. Moss would enjoy hearing of it!

The day before was one of the first hot days of summer, and Violet was so languid that she looked forward with dread to the evening, when they were to go to a *soirée* at Mrs. Bryanstone's, and she lay nursing herself, wishing for any pretence for declining it. Theodora coming in, declared that her going was out of the question; but added, "Georgina Finch is to be there; she will call for me."

"I shall be better when the heat of the day is over."

"So you may, but you shall not go for all that. You know Arthur is coming home; and you must save yourself for your Delavals to-morrow."

"I thank you, but only" — she hesitated — "if only you would be so kind as to go with Lady Elizabeth."

"I will manage for myself, thank you. I shall not think of seeing you go out to-night. Why, I went out continually with Georgina last summer" — as she saw Violet's look of disappointment.

"Yes, but all is not the same now."

"The same in effect. I am not going to attend to nonsensical gossip. Georgina is what she was then, and the same is right for me now as was right last year. I am not going to turn against her —"

"But, Theodora," said Violet's weak voice, "Percy said he hoped you never would go out with her; and I said you never should, if I could help it."

Never was Theodora more incensed than on hearing that Percy and this young girl had been arranging a check on her actions, and she was the more bent on defiance.

"Percy has nothing to do with it," she began; but she was interrupted by a message to know whether Lady Elizabeth Brandon might see Mrs. Martindale.

Her entrance strengthened Theodora's hands, and she made an instant appeal to her, to enforce on Violet the necessity of resting that evening. Lady Elizabeth fully assented, and at once asked Theodora to join her.

"I thank you, I have another arrangement," she said, reckless of those entreating eyes; "I am to go with Mrs. Finch."

"And I believe I shall be quite well enough by-and-by," said Violet.

"My dear, it is not to be thought of for you."

"Yes, Lady Elizabeth, I trust her to you to make her hear reason," said Theodora. "I shall leave her to you."

Poor Violet, already in sufficient dread of the evening, was obliged to endure a reiteration of all its possible consequences. Lady Elizabeth was positively grieved and amazed to find her, as she thought, resolutely set upon gaieties, at all risks, and spared no argument that could alarm her into remaining quietly at home, even assuring her that it was her duty not to endanger herself for the sake of a little excitement or amusement. Violet could only shut her eyes to restrain the burning tears, and listen, without one word in vindication, until Lady Elizabeth had exhausted her rhetoric, and, rising, with some coolness told her she still

hoped that she would think better of it, but that she wished her husband was at home.

Violet would fain have hid her face in her good friend's bosom, and poured out her griefs, but she could only feel that she was forfeiting for ever the esteem of one she loved so much. She held out, however. Not till the door had closed did she relax her restraint on herself, and give way to the overwhelming tears. Helpless, frightened, perplexed, forced into doing what might be fatal to her! and every one, even Arthur, likely to blame her! The burst of weeping was as terrified, as violent, as despairing as those of last year.

But she was not, as then, inconsolable; and as the first agitation spent itself she resumed her self-command, checked her sobs by broken sentences of prayer, growing fuller and clearer, then again soft and misty, till she fairly cried herself to sleep. She slept only for a short interval, but it had brought back her composure, and she was able to frame a prayer to be directed to do right and be guarded from harm; and then to turn her mind steadily to the decision. It was her duty, as long as it was in her power, to be with her husband's sister, and guard her from lowering herself by her associates. She was bound by her promise to Percy, and she could only trust that no harm would ensue.

"If it should," thought poor Violet, "I may honestly hope it is in the way of what I believe my duty; so it would be a cross, and I should be helped under it. And if the Brandons blame me — that is a cross again. Suppose I was to be as ill again as I was before — suppose I should not get through it — Oh! then I could not bear to have wilfully neglected a duty! And the next party? Oh! no need for thinking of that! I must only take thought for the day."

And soon again she slept.

Theodora had gone out so entirely convinced that Violet would relinquish her intention, that, meeting Mrs. Finch, she arranged to be taken up at eleven o'clock.

On returning home she heard that Mrs. Martindale was asleep; and as they had dined early, she drank coffee in her own room, and read with the Brogden girl, as part of her system of compensation, intending to spare further discussion by seeing Violet no more that night. She proceeded to dress her hair — not as helplessly as at first, for the lessons had not been without fruit, but to-night nothing had a good effect. Not being positively handsome, her good looks depended on colour, dress, and light; and the dislike to failure, and the desire to command attention, made it irritating to find her hair obstinate and her ornaments unbecoming; and she was in no placid state when Violet entered the room, ready dressed.

"Violet! This is too foolish!"

"I am a great deal better now, thank you."

"But I have settled it with Georgina; she is coming to call for me."

"This is not out of her way; it will make no difference to her."

"But, Violet, I will not let you go; Arthur would not allow it. You are not fit for it."

"Yes, thank you, I believe I am."

"You believe! It is very ridiculous of you to venture when you only believe," said Theodora, never imagining that those mild weary tones could withstand her for a moment. "Stay at home and rest. You know Arthur may come at any time."

"I mean to go, if you please — I know I ought."

"Then remember, if you are ill, it is your fault, not mine."

Violet attempted a meek smile.

Theodora could only show her annoyance by impatience with her toilette. Her sister tried to help her, but nothing suited, nothing pleased her — all was untoward; and at last Violet said, "Is Percy to be there?"

"Not a chance of it. What made you think so?"

"Because you care so much."

Somehow, that saying stung her to the quick, and the more because it was so innocently spoken.

"I do not care," she said. "You are so simple, Violet, you fancy all courtships must be like your own. One can't spend six years like six weeks."

The colour rushed painfully into Violet's face, and she quitted the room. It was a moment of dire shame and grief to Theodora, who had not intended a taunt, but rather to excuse her own doings; and as the words came back on her, and she perceived the most unmerited reproach they must have conveyed, she was about to hurry after her sister, explain, and entreat her pardon. Almost immediately, however, Violet returned, with her hands full of some beautiful geraniums, that morning sent to her by Mrs. Harrison.

"See," said she, "I think a wreath of these might look well."

Theodora trusted the blush had been the work of her own guilty fancy, and, recollecting how often Mrs. Nesbit's innuendoes had glanced aside, thought it best not to revive the subject. She did not estimate even the sacrifice it was to part with the glowing fragrant flowers, the arrangement of which had freshened Violet's spirits that evening when not in tune for other occupation, and she did not know that there was one little sigh of fellow-feeling at their destiny of drooping and fading in the crowd and glare. Their brilliant hues had great success, and set off the deep black eyes and hair to unusual advantage when woven by those dextrous fingers. The toilette was complete, and Theodora as kind as she could be, between shame at her own speech and dislike to being softened by little female arts.

"I only wish you looked better yourself," she said. "You are too pale for that old white dress."

"It is the coolest I have ready. It must do."

Theodora could not accuse her of over-carefulness of her renown as a beauty. Her dress was, of course, appropriate, but aimed at no more; and her worn, languid appearance did not cause her a moment's thought, since Arthur was not there to see.

They found the room very warm and crowded. Theodora saw Violet lodged on an ottoman, and then strayed away to her own friends. Mrs. Finch soon arrived, and attacked her for having let them go on a fool's errand.

"I could not help it," said Theodora, "she would come."

"She looks very unwell," said Mrs. Finch; "but, poor thing, it would be too hard to miss everything this year."

"Or does she come as your trusty knight's deputy?" asked Jane.

There was dancing; but when Captain Fitzhugh brought Theodora back to her seat, Violet whispered, "I am sorry, but would you dislike coming home now?"

"Oh! I am engaged to Lord St. Erme, and then to Mr. Gardner, and — But you go home; you have done your duty, my dear. Go home, and to sleep. Georgina will bring me. Captain Fitzhugh will find you the carriage."

She walked off with Lord St. Erme, and came no more that way. Presently there was some confusion.

"A lady fainting," said her partner, and she saw Emma looking dreadfully frightened. Conscience was enough, without the name passing from mouth to mouth. Theodora sprang forward, and following the movement, found herself in a room where Violet's insensible figure had just been placed on a bed. Lady Elizabeth was there, and Emma, and Mrs. Bryanstone. Theodora felt as if no one but herself should touch Arthur's wife; but she had never before witnessed a fainting fit, and, in her consternation and guiltiness, knew not how to be serviceable, so that all that was required was done by the other ladies. She had never ex-

perienced such alarm and remorse as now, while standing watching, until the eyes slowly opened, looked round uneasily till they fell on her, then closed for a few moments, but soon were again raised, while the soft low words were heard, "Thank you, I beg your pardon!" then, with an imploring, deprecating gaze on her, "I am sorry; indeed I could not help it!"

Theodora was almost overcome; but Lady Elizabeth gave a warning squeeze to her arm, whispering, "Take care, don't agitate her;" and this, recalling the sense that others were present, brought back her self-possession, and she only kissed Violet, tenderly bade her lie still, and hoped she was better.

She smiled, and declared herself refreshed, as the wind blew on her from the open window, and she felt the cold water on her face, and there was no silencing her thanks and apologiés for giving trouble. She said she was well enough to go home; and, as soon as the carriage was found, sat up, looking shivering and forlorn, but still summoning up smiles. "Good night, dear Lady Elizabeth," she said; "thank you very much. You see you were right."

Lady Elizabeth offered to go home with her, but she could not bear to occasion further sensation, and, besides, understood Theodora's face. She refused, and her friend kissed her, and promised to come early to-morrow to see her; but, mingled with all this care and kindness, there was something of "I told you so."

She trembled so much when she stood up, that Theodora put her strong arm round her, and nearly carried her down stairs, gratified to find her clinging to her, and refusing all other support. Scarcely a word was spoken as they went home, but Theodora held the hand, which was cold, limp, and shaking, and now and then she made inquiries, always answered by "Better, thank you."

Theodora had her directions from Lady Elizabeth, and intended to make up for her misdeeds by most attentive

care; but, on coming home, they found that Arthur had arrived, and gone to bed, so that nothing was in her power but to express more kind wishes and regrets than she could stay to hear or to answer in her extinguished voice.

Theodora was a good deal shocked, but also provoked, at having been put in the wrong. She felt as if she had sustained a defeat, and as if Violet would have an advantage over her for the future, managing her by her health, just as she ruled Arthur.

"But I will not submit," thought Theodora. "I will not bear with interference, if not from Percy, certainly not from his deputy — a mere spoilt child, a very good child, but spoilt by her position, by John's over-estimate of her, and by the deference exacted by her weakness and her engagingness. She has very sweet, winning ways, and I am very fond of her in reason, but it will be very good for her to see I can be kind to her without being her slave."

In this mind Theodora went to sleep, but was wakened in the early morning by Arthur's voice on the stairs, calling to Sarah. She threw on her dressing-gown, and half-opening her door, begged to know what was the matter.

"Only that you have done for her with your freaks and your wilfulness," answered Arthur, roughly.

"She is not ill?" exclaimed the terrified sister.

"Of course she is. I can't think what possessed you."

"I tried hard to keep her at home. But, oh! Arthur, where are you going?"

"To fetch Harding."

"Can I do anything? Can I be of use? Let me go to her. Oh! Arthur, pray let me."

He went into the room, and brought back word that Violet wanted no one but Sarah, and was a little more comfortable; only begging Theodora would be so kind as to go to the nursery, lest little Johnnie should awake.

Thither she repaired, but without the satisfaction of usefulness, for the child slept soundly till his nurse returned. Mr. Harding had been there, and Mrs. Martindale was better,

needing only complete quiet; but Sarah was extremely brief, scornful, and indignant, and bestowed very few words on Miss Martindale. "Yes, Ma'am — no, Ma'am," was all that hard pumping could extract, except funereal and mysterious sighs and shakes of the head, and a bustling about, that could only be understood to intimate that she wished to have her nursery to herself.

It was still so early that Theodora had time to go to church; as usual, she met the Brandons; and Lady Elizabeth, much concerned at her tidings, came home with her to see how the patient was going on.

Lady Elizabeth forbore to reproach Violet, but she lectured Arthur on allowing her to be imprudent. He took it in very good part, not quite disagreeing when told they were all too young together, and made a hearty protest that she should be well looked after for the future.

He was certainly doing his part. All the morning he was in and out, up and down stairs, effectually preventing any rest, as his sister thought.

Theodora's time passed in strange variations of contrition, jealousy, and perverseness. She was hurt at his displeasure, — she was injured by her exclusion from Violet's room, — she was wounded even by her little nephew, who cried downstairs for mamma, and upstairs for Sarah, and would not be content with her best endeavours to make him happy. And yet, when, after carefully looking to see that he could come to no harm, Sarah was obliged to place him on the floor and leave him for the first time alone with his father, he sat motionless, fixed in earnest, intent contemplation, like a sort of distant worship of him, keeping him likewise in a silent amused wonder, what would come next; and when it ended in a gravely, distinctly pronounced, "Papa!" Arthur started as if it had been a jackdaw speaking, then picked up the little fellow in his arms and carried him off to show, as a natural curiosity, to his mother! At any other time, Theodora would have been charmed at the rare sight of Arthur fondling his little boy; now she only

felt that nobody wanted her, and that she was deprived of even the dignity of a nursery-maid.

Her chief occupation was answering inquiries, and writing notes to decline their evening engagements, — the dinner at Mrs. Delaval's among the rest, for she and Arthur were equally resolved to remain at home that evening, and she wished to persuade herself that they were Violet's friends, not her own.

In the midst, Mrs. Finch and Miss Gardner called, and in her state of irritation, the smooth tongue of the latter was oil to the flame.

"Poor thing, no doubt she thinks she has been making a heroic exertion. Well, she has her reward! It must be delightful to have caused such a sensation. Your brother is a most devoted husband."

"And did she really go because she would not trust you without her?" said Mrs. Finch. "Well, that is a good joke!"

"I think you must be glad they do not live at Brogden," quietly added Jane, in the midst of her sister's laughter.

"It has been put into her head," said Theodora, "that she ought to look after me, and a great mistake it is."

"Yes, you are not come here to be less free than last year, when Lord and Lady Martindale had you in their own hands," said Georgina. "If I were you I would do something strong all at once, and settle that matter. That was the way you used to dispose of the governesses."

"I am not quite what I was then, Georgina."

"But what is it that she objects to? I see," as Jane made a sign, as if to advise her not to inquire. "Is it to your coming out with me? Well! I declare, that is pretty well, considering who she was. I thought better things of her, with her soft voice, as if she was thankful to be spoken to, after all the notice I have taken of her." —

"Hush! hush! I tell you, she would never have originated the notion, but it has been put into her, and when she thinks a thing right, nothing will stop her."

"We will see that!" said Georgina. "Come and dine with us to-night, and then we are going to *Der Freischütz*. Come —"

"That is impossible, thank you. We have given up the dinner at the Delavals, and I do not intend to go out in the evening any more. I came here to take care of her, and I mean to do so thoroughly."

"Not to go out any more!" cried Georgina, horrified.

"I honour Theodora," said Jane. "Such devotion is like her, and must win her brother's gratitude."

"No devotion at all. I like a rational evening with her much better than a cram like last night's."

"With her alone?" said Jane, slily.

Theodora crimsoned. Percy had instigated Violet's opposition, and she was in no charity with him. Jane saw there was annoyance, and turned the subject, before her sister could open on it. With all her quiet ways, Jane had the mastery over the impetuous Georgina, whom she apparently flattered and cherished as a younger sister, but in reality made subservient to her own purposes. Indeed, Jane was like the Geraldine of Christabelle; without actually speaking evil she had the power of insinuating her own views, so that even the lofty and sincere nature of Theodora was not proof against her. Poor Violet! while she perilled herself, and sacrificed her friend's good opinion, her sister's mind was being hardened and poisoned against her.

"I am afraid," said Jane, "that it is of no use then to talk to you of what Georgina and I have been planning."

"Oh! Theodora must come to that at any rate!" cried Georgina, "or I will never forgive her nor Mrs. Martindale neither. Do you remember our old birthday treat to Richmond?"

"To be sure I do!" cried Theodora. "It was one of the most delightful days I ever had in my life. I have loved cowslips doubly, for the treat the sight of them was, in the midst of London and masters, seven years ago! Why, you will be twenty-four next week, Georgina!"

"Growing to an unmentionable age," said Georgina. "Well, I have set my heart on a pic-nic to Richmond again. Mark is to take a steamer for us, and I know of plenty of people who will make a charming party!"

"I should like it better without the people," said Theodora.

"Oh! nonsense, one can't babble of green-fields, and run after cowslips at our age, unless one is in love!" said Georgina. "If you were going to bring your Percy, perhaps, we would not interfere with your sweet rural felicity, my dear."

"We will bring some one else," said Jane. "After poor Mrs. Martindale had carried you off, Theodora, I found the author of *Pausilippo* looking extremely disconsolate, and hinting to him that such a scheme was in agitation, and that you were included in it, he looked so eager that he will be for ever beholden to Georgina for an invitation."

"Poor Lord St. Erme!" said Georgina. "It really is a shame, Theodora. I rather take him under my protection. Shall he come or shall he not?"

"It makes no difference to me," said Theodora, coolly.

"Whatever it does to him, eh?"

"But, Georgina, you are not in the least secure of Theodora," said Jane, satirically. "She is devoted to Mrs. Martindale."

"If my sister-in-law is not well, I shall not leave her; if she is, you may depend upon me."

"I shall do no such thing, whatever Georgina does," said Jane.

"I am sure Mrs. Martindale has ways and means."

"I shall not stay without real reason."

"And bring the Captain!" entreated Mrs. Finch.

"Still more doubtful," suggested Jane.

"Yes, I think you will not get him," said Theodora; "but I will certainly join you, provided Violet is not really ill."

"I am very good friends with that pretty sister of yours," said Jane. "I will call some day, and try to get her permission for him."

"Once — twice — you have failed us," said Mrs. Finch, rising to take leave. "This third time, and I shall believe it is some one else in the shape of Theodora Martindale."

"I will not fail," repeated Theodora.

They departed, and presently Arthur came down. "How long those women have been here! Have they been hatching treason? I want you to go up and sit with Violet; I am going out for an hour."

It was a tame conclusion to the morning's alarms when a brisk voice answered, "Come in" at her knock, and Violet lay very comfortably reading; her eyes bright and lively, and her cheeks with almost their own colour. Her sweet smile and grateful face chased away ill humour; and Theodora was so affectionate and agreeable as to surprise herself, and make her believe herself subject to the fascination Violet exercised over her brothers.

She told Arthur, on his return, that Violet was just ill enough to make waiting on her pretty pastime; but was something between alarmed and angry to find him still uneasy.

END OF VOL. I.

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